

THE STRUGGLE FOR PERSIA

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DONALD STUART



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THE STRUGGLE FOR PERSIA

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BY
DONALD STUART

WITH A FRONTISPIECE AND MAP

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TO
THE GREAT PERSIAN WHO RULES
THE DESTINIES OF THE SHAH'S DOMINIONS
THE ATABAK AZAM

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PREFACE

NONE of my predecessors (and they may be counted on the fingers) who have taken the almost impassable route between Eastern Russia (*via* Tabriz) to Teheran having thought fit to record their experiences, it devolves upon my unworthy self to narrate mine in this veritable "terra incognita."

The interest lately awakened in England with reference to Persian affairs, together with the lamentable loss of British prestige and British influence, and the overwhelming power of Russia—as they appeared to me—must be my further excuse for bringing them to the notice of all lovers of king and country, in the earnest hope that means may be found to retrieve the paramount supremacy of England in a country where once it was without a rival.

D. S.

LONDON, 1902

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. "EASTWARD HO!"	I
II. ODESSA AND THE CRIMEA	11
III. THE BLACK SEA (AFOU, SUCHUM, ETC.)	21
IV. BATOUM (THE PLAGUE)	30
V. TIFLIS	38
VI. FAREWELL CIVILISATION (A RUSSIAN POST HOUSE)	48
VII. WE JOLT OUR WEARY LENGTH ALONG	56
VIII. THE LAND OF THE LION AND THE SUN	66
IX. TAZA-KAND (DREADFUL EXPERIENCES)	76
X. TABRIZ	81
XI. A DAY'S SHOOTING	98
XII. A VERMIN DISTRICT	104
XIII. THE KAFLAN-KUH	114
XIV. TEHERAN	124
XV. TEHERAN—(<i>Continued</i>)	149
XVI. THE PEACOCK THRONE	165
XVII. THE SHAH'S ARMY	175
XVIII. THE RUSSIAN OCTOPUS	187

CHAP.	PAGE
XIX. RAILWAY ENTERPRISE	201
XX. HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT	209
XXI. MESHED AND BUSHIRE (TURQUOISE AND PEARL)	219
XXII. WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING FORTH .	246
XXIII. THROUGH "HOLY RUSSIA"	258
XXIV. ENGLAND TO THE RESCUE	266

THE STRUGGLE FOR PERSIA

CHAPTER I

“EASTWARD-HO!”

“**B**UT you’re too late.” “You’ll be snowed up.” These and many similar remarks were the considerate comments of certain friends to whom, last October, I imparted my intention of travelling to Persia through Eastern Russia.

Certainly it appeared a little late, but my Persian interpreter, who was to be my companion and guide for some considerable time to come, assured me—not without a tone of exultation—that the Persian calendar differed materially from our modern efforts of accurately measuring time, and that such a thing as being snowed up amidst the mountain passes of Northern Persia was not to be dreamed of before the end of November. As events

proved, he was barely right ; on 26th November we traversed the dreaded Kaflan-Kuh under a nearly tropical sun, and twenty-four hours later were overtaken by an almost blinding snowstorm.

Leaving Victoria early on the 22nd October, we crossed the North Sea to Flushing between 12 and 6 P.M., and although the sea was like a duck-pond, it proved too much for my Persian guide, and, on coming alongside the Flemish Port, I had literally to shake him out of a bundle of rugs. Travellers passing eastward are happily not subjected to the unnecessary annoyance of Custom inspection, and, beyond being locked into a waiting-room, and eventually herded into the waiting train, are not pestered by vexatious formalities. It was during this period that our first experience of robbery as a science was purchased. Approaching with a courtly bow, an official in the uniform of a Field-Marshal enquired of us our destination, and hastened—as he assured us—to reserve a *coupé*. Understanding from experienced travellers that a preliminary fee is infinitely more potent than a larger one at the end of a journey, I slipped half-a-crown into his hand, and patiently awaited the result of this masterpiece of diplomacy.

Consoling ourselves with the prospect of thirteen hours' comfort, we proceeded leisurely to the train, and pitied our fellow travellers, rushing and scrambling for what we had obtained with so little cost and trouble ; but alas for the honesty of Dutch Field-M Marshals ! Every *coupé* and apparently every seat was occupied, and our courteous cicerone was conspicuous by his absence. Sitting bolt upright and bewailing our shattered hopes till we reached the German frontier, we were courteously placed in an empty "Ladies' compartment" by the Prussian conductor, and had the gratification of presenting him with a coin in presence of his predecessor, presumably an uncivil subordinate of the wicked Field-Marshal.

Berlin, which we reached about 8 A.M., has the advantage—sometimes a qualified one—of possessing four stations, at one or other of which the London express is stopped as circumstances demand. It was our misfortune on this occasion to have to alight at that most distant from our destination, and, after a drive across the city, we reached the Central Hotel, a palatial establishment close to the Freidrich Strasse Station.

Breakfasting later on in the coffee-room, I was surprised at being greeted by at least four waiters,

who addressed me in various degrees of enthusiasm : " You remember, sir, I used to wait on you at the Café Royal ;" " I was two years, sir, at the Metropole ;" " I had to come back to be a soldier ;" " I wish I was back at the Cecil ;" all which remarks convinced me that there was some truth in a popular ditty of a few years ago : " When a Gearmans coom to England he never vish to go home."

At 3 P.M. we were again under weigh, *en route* to Warsaw, with an eighteen hours' railway journey before us ; in the interval, however, I had driven through the principal thoroughfares, seen the Guard mounting parade, and had pointed out to me by my driver the window whence " Wilhelm der Gross "—as he called him—used daily to " take the salute." " But see, they are coming," he continued ; and, preceded by a splendid band, as fine a body of soldiers as ever I saw swung past, and, breaking off in various directions, proceeded to their respective guards.

Berlin is not a lively town ; to a stranger it is absolutely dreary. Its cafés are run apparently on the same lines, and lack that vitality which is to be found in every similar establishment between the Madeleine and the Place République ; and sitting

in a leading one "Under der Linden," I could not help thinking how the French Army would have fretted for "Gai Paris," if ever they had got "à Berlin," and so I consumed a bock, and "noch ein ander."

Reaching Alexandrovo on the Russian frontier at 1 A.M., we had our first experience of Russian officialism. Previous to leaving London, I had received a strong personal letter from the Russian Ambassador, informing the Customs officials that I was merely passing through Russian territory and requesting that I might be permitted to take the gun I had with me. Fire-arms, it may be explained, are the most prohibited of all prohibited things in Holy Russia, and I can never express adequate gratitude to His Excellency for his priceless recommendation; without it my gun would assuredly have been confiscated and I probably half way to Siberia, whilst with it, my reception was courteous if surly; anyway it was to the point.

Assuming in my innocence that a letter from so exalted a diplomatist would insure me immediate attention, I jumped out of the train with the confidence of a conqueror and made my way to the sole occupant of the platform, a terribly important

fellow, wrapt in furs and armed to the teeth, and presuming, rightly, that he was the dreaded chief of the Customs, tendered him my letter. "Back to your carriage, sir," was, however, my freezing reception, and escorted by a Cossack who at the moment came up, I was politely but firmly conducted to my seat. But the shot had had the desired effect; watching him with a smile of triumph I observed him read and re-read the letter, till another official almost as befurred as himself appeared, and with heads close together they again perused the document.

Meanwhile not a soul had left the train, whilst amidst the silence of the catacombs a detachment of Cossacks appeared and proceeded to invade the various carriages, laying hands on every rug and portmanteau, and directing the owners to follow. It was now our turn, and accompanied by a Cossack who carried the fatal gun, I entered the waiting-room. I have seen a good many Custom-houses in my time, but what met my gaze as I entered this one, baffles description: standing round a huge platform, on which was the luggage, were the respective owners, whilst within the enclosure was a battalion of officials. Steadily making the tour was a tremendous official, pre-

ceded by a dozen myrmidons, who, unstrapping, unlocking, turned everything bodily out of everything; my books, a photographic album, and the gun were immediately pounced upon and carried to an inner table; every pillow was pinched from end to end, every garment shaken, every boot minutely inspected. A foolish lady in my immediate vicinity, who had evidently bestowed considerable time and ingenuity in sewing a few yards of silk into a cushion, was gesticulating violently as nimble fingers, having detected a foreign substance, were ripping open what appeared a valuable article; and so by degrees the confiscated mass on the inner table assumed gigantic proportions, whilst the owners were escorted one by one to explain their temerity in daring to outrage the laws of “Holy Russia.” It may benefit travellers to know that no book, newspaper or printed matter whatever, is permitted to enter the country, except by the special permission of the Chief Director, and as this official resides at St. Petersburg, the consequences are liable to be either confiscation or the delay of a week pending reference.

It was now my turn to be escorted to the fatal table. First my books (cheap editions of popular novels) were turned over by page, and then

the gun came under observation ; at this juncture the officials appeared to close round with bated breath, whilst I was asked what I intended doing with it—would I undertake not to linger with it in Russia? I offered, if facilities were afforded me, to make affidavit on the spot, anything to end the tenterhooks I was on, and then after another whispered consultation I was informed that on payment of eight roubles I might take my gun. On completion of these formalities, my passport was restored to me.

Paying one's railway fare in Russia by no means ends one's liabilities, and an extra charge per seat (*place carte*) is imposed before one can enter a train. If Jones and Robinson are travelling together and are respectively numbers 25 and 26, they incur the certainty of being shaken out of a profound sleep if by chance they get mixed and erroneously occupy 26 and 25 ; and the officials on this particular line seem to have nothing better to do than to wander from carriage to carriage, trying to detect such serious errors.

At length we resumed our dismal journey, and at 10 A.M. reached Warsaw. Warsaw, after a five hours' sojourn, appeared to me as dismal a town as I had ever visited. It swarmed with Polish Jews

and officers—dressed apparently in nothing but buttoned-up great-coats and high boots. I was glad when we were on the road at 3 P.M., and entering the most luxurious *coupé* of a corridor train I have ever been in, we commenced our twenty-eight hours' journey to Odessa. Alas, our congratulations were a little premature! This particular train was on the main line for elsewhere, and at 7 A.M. we were turned out to continue our journey in the typical carriage of an ordinary Russian train. The feeding arrangements on these long journeys, it must be admitted, are excellent; the food, moreover, is not only good but reasonable and generous; at about 9 A.M. a halt of fifteen minutes enables one to procure a capital *table d'hôte* breakfast, about 1 a similar halt for lunch, and at 7 half-an-hour gives ample time for the consumption of a dinner that would not disgrace a Parisian restaurant.

The system of time-keeping throughout Russia is somewhat confusing; every clock points to St. Petersburg time, even if the difference extends to hours; trains, however, start by local time, and it behoves travellers to be on the alert when making their arrangements for a journey.

At length we reached Odessa after a record

journey of seventy-two hours, exclusive of twelve hours' compulsory delay between the arrival and departure of trains.

The reader will forgive me if I have brought him so far at express rate ; a description of this well-trodden route at length would be as absurd as a description of a journey to Brighton, and has only been introduced to keep up the line of communication till we reach that "terra incognita" between Tiflis and Teheran (*via* Julfa and Tabriz), which, it is no exaggeration to assert, no twelve Europeans have ever traversed. By Europeans, it must be understood that I mean *bona fide* Europeans, and not that mongrel race of Armenians and Caucasians who swarm between Odessa and Tiflis, and who claim to be Germans and Russians without the smallest grounds for such pretences.

The Anglo-Saxon race apparently does not lend itself to this assumption of nationality ; either we are too bluff, or our build is too square rigged, hence instances are rarely, if ever, found of a cringing oily Armenian asserting "I am Eengleeshman."

CHAPTER II

ODESSA AND THE CRIMEA

THE St. Petersburg Hotel, situated in the vicinity of the harbour, is an excellent house, in the hands of an experienced Frenchman. The cuisine is beyond reproach, and, as is usually found in Russia, fairly reasonable.

Imported wines and spirits, however, are luxuries to be approached with caution, and a half-bottle of Martell's brandy caused me considerable astonishment when assessed in my bill at twelve roubles (24s.).

The alternative of drinking Russian cognac, or the universal vodka, is like olives or a love for infants—an acquired taste—which no denizen of Western Europe can hope to attain under many years' probation; the latter, indeed, can only be compared to glycerine and tannin, and more likely

to produce nausea than mental aberration. Russians, *par excellence*, are the best of diners. The *table d'hôte* breakfasts, varying from two and a-half to four roubles (including a half-bottle of wine), are a series of courses sufficient for a family, commencing with soup and ending with coffee. Prior to the meal proper, however, a trip to the buffet is absolutely *en rigueur*; here every *hors d'œuvre*—caviare, pickled salmon, olives, sliced sausage, and a dozen dishes I had never before seen—have to be indulged in—gratis—not forgetting the inevitable vodka, by which time the soup is served, and the serious business commences. This prelude is known as “zagonsky.” But even this is often improved upon in the grander hotels, where everybody seats himself at a long table, groaning with *hors d'œuvres*, and then at a given signal the entire company indulge in a species of gastronomical blind-man's-buff, turn on their heels without a word, and make for the next table.

What first strikes an Englishman, even in the best hotels, is the paucity of the water supply and the inadequate facilities for the most ordinary ablutions. If you ask for a warm bath, a delay of half-an-hour is sure to occur before the key of the bath-room can be found; then the taps, from long

disuse, work rustily and unsatisfactorily, whilst the warm water supply gurgles out a tepid streamlet that requires no diluting. In the sleeping apartments this dislike of water is still more apparent. Basins there are none, beyond a small sink such as is found in a steamer, which is supplied by a streamlet of the dimensions of a squirt. This must be utilised as it descends, for no plugs exist for damming the water, necessitating what is known as a "cheap wash."

I have never seen a fine dowager wrapped in sables, nor a dashing sabreur, immaculate in the brightest of uniforms, without having the squirt brought visibly to my mind, and a doubt has arisen within me whether Russia is really holy, or whether there is any truth in the adage of "cleanliness being next to Godliness."

It was a sad disappointment on the day after my arrival to find that Count Schouvaloff, the Governor of Odessa, had only that week vacated his appointment. To be countenanced by the Governor of a Russian province is an advantage not to be lightly appraised, and I am sure if these lines ever meet the eye of His Excellency—which is highly improbable—he will pardon my recalling the record night in the "seventies" when he

honoured me by permitting me to pilot him through some very unique sights in London. How childish was his delight, how genuine his astonishment at the "ratting" he witnessed at Jimmy Shaw's in Windmill Street, at a bout with the gloves by the two leading heavy weights of the day, and a MAIN of cocks in Faultless's cellar in Endell Street. As we descended to those subterranean regions, I recall the whispered anxiety of a sporting duke—long since gone over to the majority—"Supposing the police come in?" and my assuring reply, "What does it matter, they can't arrest the Russian ambassador!"

The rusty key still hangs over the little shop in Endell Street; the display of rusty iron in the window is apparently the same, but the sporting old man—probably the last of the real old English type—the cockpit, and its multifarious addenda, have long since been swept into the universal dustbin, and the truth of Algernon Swinburne's lines is reluctantly forced on the most seasoned, of how—

"Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses and wives;
And marriage, and death and division
Make barren our lives."

The most unyielding custom in "Holy Russia," never to be shirked, never modified, is the uncovering and remaining uncovered all the time one is under a roof. If one purchases a boot-lace it must be done hat in hand, and being defrauded out of two roubles for a box of sardines must be submitted to in the same reverential attitude. I had an explanation given me for this irritating custom, although I cannot vouch for its accuracy—viz., That as every house, shop, theatre, steamer saloon, and hotel contains one or two images so essential to the Greek faith, the homage is intended for the effigy and not for the rascally tradesman.

I had decided to cross the Black Sea in preference to forty-eight hours' discomfort by rail, and so at 3 P.M. we were again under weigh for Batoum. Happily this was the coasting boat, which alternates in a bi-weekly service with another that touches at no intermediary ports. The steamers are exceptionally good in every respect ; large and powerful sea-boats, they possess excellent cabin accommodation, a liberal and faultless table, experienced captains who speak English and French fluently, and are, moreover, moderate in their charges, as thirty-nine roubles

(£3, 18s.) for three square meals daily, besides early tea and a roomy cabin, for five days testifies.

Our first halt was Sebastopol, which we reached at 9 next morning, and where we happily remained for six hours. It had been the dream of my life, ever since reading Kinglake's "Crimea," to see the heights of Alma, the Sandbag battery—where Pennefather swore from morning to night—the deep ravine leading to it, which the columns of Russians ascended only to be beaten back by a handful of British troops, and the field of Inkerman. So hiring a drosky we bade the driver drive towards Balaclava. But our geography, I fear, being not faultless, our knowledge of Russian limited, and having a delicacy in asking the native Jehu too pointedly; all combined with the limited time at our disposal to make it doubtful whether we saw anything we desired. Suffice it to say I had landed in the Crimea, surely a spot no Englishman could set foot on without a thrill of pride at the thought of that glorious but mismanaged campaign.

Sebastopol, as may be supposed, swarms with soldiers—officers apparently considerably in excess of men—and it requires no shrewd observer to see how deep-rooted is their detestation of anything

English ; if they pass one, it is with an ill-concealed scowl, and if circumstances necessitate one's asking them to pass the salt, the compliance is evidently not a labour of love. On board the "Grand Duke Constantine" there were scores of these uncouth fellow-passengers, all dressed in great-coats buttoned up to the throat, with swords and spurs they apparently never removed. One poor wretch in the agonies of extreme *mal de mer* presented a piteous sight "contemplating" the sea with his sword listlessly between his legs—it was the opportunity for the accursed Englishman, had not chivalry and pity forbade ! But speaking seriously, it is an undeniable fact, patent to all, how deep-rooted and universal is this Russian hatred of the English ; the waiters who take one's tips scowl at one whilst serving one ; the audible remarks of tradesmen as one enters their shops are clearly not complimentary, and the officers give one the idea of seeking a quarrel, so barefaced and offensive is their bearing. And the Russian army of to-day—be it remembered—is not the unwieldly raw mass of humanity that opposed us in the Crimea. Roads, railways especially, have been considerable factors in all this, and whereas in 1854 the vast resources of the distant empire

could only be brought across the Steppes in dribblets, footsore and ragged, to be shot down and replaced by similar levies, now we are confronted by the possibility of five million trained warriors being brought in a few days or hours to any given point from the remotest garrisons in the Empire.

This is the problem that ought to absorb the attention of every serious-minded Englishman, for it affects no other nation : how to check Russia before her strength is irresistible. It is absurd to blink the fact that England and Russia are hereditary foes, that the antipathy is transmitted in every Russian mother's milk, that the duel *à outrance*, when it does take place, will be a battle of giants, where one only of the combatants will leave the field—one to be eternally annihilated, the other to dictate terms to the world. Personal observations have convinced me that everything is tending towards this goal, and that it must be left to higher authorities to check the daily encroachments of Russia on British interests in Persia before she is sufficiently prepared to ignore our protests, her contempt of them backed by half-a-million Cossacks. Only lately I read a work by a distinguished author and evident

friend of Russia's—Sir George Clarke, "Russia's Sea Power" (Murray, 1898)—in which he suggests that some understanding should be arrived at with Russia as regards certain controversial matters, some accommodation and mutual concessions exchanged, and concludes by challenging anyone to give a single authentic instance of Russian encroachment where British influence has been assumed to predominate. Foolish theories! Vain hopes! destined to bring forth Dead Sea fruit. Russia seeks neither understanding nor accommodation with England; until she is ready, she will pursue her usual tactics of undermining and laying the trains; when she is prepared, the fuse will be applied. Whether this generation or the next will hear the report of the explosion depends upon circumstances, but will in no way avert the inevitable.

I think if Sir George Clarke had visited Persia since those lines were written he would have considerably modified his views. Later on I will endeavour to justify my dismal forebodings by describing what I saw and heard from the friends as well as the enemies of our country in every bazaar of Northern and Southern

Persia over which I travelled during a period of many months, and in Chapter XIX. will suggest a basis for that accommodation and mutual concession proposed by Sir George Clarke.

CHAPTER III

THE BLACK SEA

(*Afon, Suchum, &c.*)

FOR the class of travellers who take periodical winter pilgrimages to Cairo, the Riviera, and India, I can conceive no more delightful and novel way of spending two or three months between October and January than in taking a trip to the Black Sea. To a bracing but mild climate—for snow is unknown till January, and lasts till early March—may be added scenery that dwarfs any of the glorious combinations of mountain and forest to be met with even in Switzerland. The fare, moreover, may be estimated at £7 from London to Warsaw, £5 more to Odessa, and by steamer to Batoum at £4; thus £25 will be found ample for all incidentals such as living and sight-seeing.

The Caucasus is truly a glorious country where, to quote an accepted authority, "every prospect pleases, and only man is vile;" it may be explored by sea, and halts made at delightful hamlets nestling amongst pines, with the huge range of mountains towering over them, or—before the snows—along a magnificent road which extends for some 120 miles; this, however, applies more especially to that portion extending between Batoum and Tiflis.

Not that I would recommend this route to any but the hardened traveller in search of novelty, for the various tribes are literally but half civilised. One instance of the semi-barbarity of the inhabitants of these mountain passes came under my notice in the Ossetian district, within twenty miles of the railway. Sitting round on the floor, gnawing raw meat, or tearing it with their fingers, were mother, father, and half-a-dozen children, the latter running at intervals to suckle the mother during their barbaric feast.

Leaving Sebastopol, the good ship "Grand Duke Constantine" proceeded on her coasting tour—never more than a mile from shore. Along the entire route the gorgeous panorama was one succession of surprises: at one moment stretches

of fertile plain to be succeeded by lofty mountains appearing in the distance, which in their turn gave place to huge mountain torrents, pouring down in break-neck fashion over precipices and through ravines till they rolled leisurely into the sea. Then a cosy hamlet nestling amongst pines would open up, and anon as our steam whistle sounded, boats manned in thoroughly oriental style would shoot out from the shore. All would be life on deck, as cargo began to be stacked ready for disembarkation, and Russian matrons, scowling—as is their chronic expression—surrounded by a brood of broad-faced, half-washed tadpoles fought for positions near the gangway with as much energy as our own British excursionists, oblivious to the fact that they were at least an hour too soon, and to the levelling propensities of hawsers and other paraphernalia incidental to a stoppage at sea.

One of the most delightful of these marine milestones was the village of Afon. Viewing this from the steamer one might have been contemplating a hamlet on the lake of Geneva; the illusion was only dispelled when dusky Arabs and turbaned Turks, shouting, bellowing, and gesticulating, sought to bring their unwieldy barges alongside, and marvellous was the dexterity they exhibited,

not only in "bringing to" but in stowing the cargo as it poured in.

As the bales (mostly flour) descended by the steam windlass in what appeared a hopeless mass, it was incredible how readily the three or four half-naked boatmen reduced them to order, and it was only when a sack burst, smothering them in flour, that the guttural sounds gave place to mirth, as, sitting on the gunwale and slapping their thighs, the men gave way to convulsive laughter. Nor are these "bum" boats without the inevitable "Curio" seller so familiar to passengers at Singapore and Ceylon, and it was on one of these occasions I first became familiar with the ubiquitous presence of the Russian detective. Producing a purse full of coins, a specimen of that mongrel class—half Jew, half Armenian, of Caucasian origin and a Russian subject—offered me a coin, which I could not but see was rare and antique. I am no judge of coins beyond being able to detect the speckled surface that denotes the sand mould, but this one was unquestionably genuine, portraying on one side the Virgin and the Holy Child, whilst on the other were hieroglyphics quite unintelligible to me. Around me stood a gaping crowd, and a person on whose opinion

I was disposed to rely, assured me I should not be far wrong in offering five roubles. Emphasising my offer by holding up the gold coin, my bid was indignantly declined, and the deal so far as I was concerned was over.

Shortly after, when we were seated at dinner, the steward informed me that two gentlemen wished to speak to me. Surprised at the intimation, I went into the passage and was confronted by two most courteous individuals, one of whom was in a gorgeous uniform, whilst in the other I recognised an inoffensive fellow-passenger who had accompanied us from Odessa, and was usually to be seen on deck.

"You were offered some coins, sir, I believe," was the opening speech. "May we ask you to show us any you may have purchased?"

I replied that although I had examined several I had purchased none, whereupon with numerous apologies they bowed themselves up the companion. Of course they were police officers, but whether the would-be vendor was an unlicensed dealer, or suspected of possessing stolen property, I never troubled to inquire.

These secret police are to be met with everywhere—at *table d'hôtes*, on railway platforms, and

even in the railway carriages, and although not distinguishable by their boots, as their English prototypes are said to be, are easily recognised by the initiated by the cut of their full beards. Possessing as they all do a smattering of English and French, it behoves strangers to be particularly careful of any out-spoken opinions adverse to Russian laws or Russian potentates, for finding fault with anything in "Holy Russia" is a heinous offence, and every new face—especially a foreign one—has their assiduous attention till the passport has been inspected and found in order, after which one is apparently left to one's own devices.

A Russian hotel proprietor or householder of any description is forbidden under severe penalty to harbour a stranger, or to give him a night's lodging, until the latter has shown his passport, which is immediately despatched to the chief police bureau. After an interval of six hours (with luck) it is returned with a fresh endorsement on it, and then—and not till then—the wayfarer is received with every demonstration of welcome. My passport, which in early October was a picture of cleanliness, is now a mass of hieroglyphics, extending half way across it on either side.

English tourists in search of new fields might do

worse than make a trip to the Black Sea, and to any such I would suggest a start from Odessa, where reliable interpreters can be engaged ; then, with a week in Sebastopol—where a superb hotel alongside the landing-place is to be found—and the Crimea, and a day or two at the most interesting of the various seaside resorts, delightful months between October and January may be spent. If, after that, they are disposed to extend their experiences, a twelve hours' trip by train from Batoum to Tiflis will be found novel and interesting.

Again under weigh, we “lay to” every few hours till we reached Suchum. This beautiful town possesses what to ladies ought to be of incomparable interest. It is here that the austere of nunneries is established in an extensive convent ; of a most rigorous order, they are invisible to any of the stronger sex, whilst to their own they are not only communicative and accessible, but delighted to show strangers over their dreary domicile. Although I endeavoured to procure particulars of their mode of life, their observances, and their sect generally, it was an impossible task to one not conversant with the language, and whose only informants were those of

one's own sex. Ladies, however, would encounter none of these difficulties, and by spending a week in Suchum would obtain the most fascinating details of the habits of a secluded "order," by that most potent of agencies—ocular demonstration.

It was here that the first well-dressed Russian officer I had met came on board ; he was—I was told — a general from St. Petersburg on an inspection tour of the Black Sea forts. I had ample opportunity of observing him (from the next table, for Russian officers of high rank prefer not to sit at table with ordinary clay), and noticed with pleasure an immaculate clean white shirt and sleeve links under his faultless uniform. His hands also showed that they underwent periodical observation, and altogether he would be pronounced a well-dressed man in any society. Accompanying him was a Cossack General, whose tastes evidently leaned towards flannel, and apparently always the same. He was my companion day and night on steamer and railway till we reached Tiflis, and the same comfortable, if not spotless, garment was ever before me.

Again two or three stoppages of little or no interest, and on the fifth day we reached Batoum,

after as delightful a voyage, on a sea as smooth as glass, as has ever fallen to my lot.

Grimy Batoum, cesspool for every cut-throat in Asia Minor, deserves a chapter to itself, and although my stay was limited to hours, I saw and heard enough not to desire to extend it.

CHAPTER IV

BATOUM

(The Plague)

MY first experience of Batoum was not a cheerful one, and after the usual demand for my passport I was informed that the plague had appeared. Startled by the proximity of this terrible scourge, I decided to continue our journey to Tiflis without delay. But alas! the next train was not until the following morning, so in the hope of not finding ourselves in quarantine I accepted the inevitable and ordered dinner. It was here that the first ray of hope was given me by the courtesy of a German merchant whom I met at table. Two unmistakable cases, he informed me, had appeared some five days previously, in one instance the victim being a man, and in the other a boy. Both had developed the preliminary symptoms of head-

ache and high fever, followed in due course by boils under the arms and abdomen, with blotches over the face and body, and both had eventually died with the unmistakable black disfiguration that proclaims to the veriest tyro the presence of the dread intruder. But Russian ways are not as our ways ; they like to be sure as well as slow, so the first enquiry was by the local faculty who, not being satisfied of the premises, decided to telegraph to Tiflis where the principal medical authorities of the district reside. These in their turn elected to travel to Batoum before committing themselves to a decision, and had arrived on the same day as myself, namely, the sixth day after the deaths had occurred. Meanwhile, the two masses of corruption lay unburied ; no steps had been taken as regards disinfection or isolation, and it was publicly announced that the "official" cause of death would be made known on the morrow at noon.

As our train started at 10 A.M., we had no particular cause for anxiety on the question of quarantine, beyond that naturally suggesting itself to any reasoning being who unexpectedly finds himself in the immediate presence of this terrible scourge.

The consequences, as I eventually heard, were

exactly what were to be expected. The solons from Tiflis had solemnly pronounced it as "Plague"; Batoum next day (31st October) was placed in quarantine, but not before the epidemic had secured a strong foothold, and to-day (8th January) the scourge is raging unabated, and the quarantine is rigidly enforced.

One is fain to ask what might have been the result had the prompt action of our own sanitary authorities been taken forthwith by these dilatory guardians of the public health, if the corpses had been buried at once, the clothing immediately burnt, and fumigation broadcast resorted to. Batoum, be it remembered, is an important sea-port town. The "messengeries" steamers proceed thence to Constantinople and Marseilles; ships of every nation are to be found in its harbour; one of the direct routes from Europe to the East is *via* Batoum, and such negligence as undoubtedly took place becomes not only a serious personal but commercial menace to Europe. And if fostered by such serious neglect, such culpable disregard of the most ordinary precautions, ought, and in any country but Russia and possibly Spain, would be visited by well-merited punishment. It was only when surrounded by the comparative comforts of

a railway *coupé* that one realised what one had escaped by not being in quarantine at Batoum.

My fellow traveller, to whom I am indebted for most of these details, told me he had not intended so hurried a departure, but the commercial loss he would have sustained had he delayed a day decided him not to await the "official" report. I was much interested in what he imparted to me on various subjects, such as the petroleum industry, and the numerous copper mines that are said to exist along the entire Caucasus Range. Caucasian mining concessions, however, have a terrible reputation amongst city speculators, representations even when made by reputedly respectable people having invariably been found to be exaggerated or untrue.

The existence of Caucasian copper and other minerals is sceptically accepted by hard-headed English investors, and anything short of the most indisputable proofs is now but an idle tale to English ears.

I explained all this to my friend, adding that if any particular proprietor were prepared to show his *bona fides* by accepting the entire purchase money in shares, and by bearing a portion of the expense of an expert's report, a company could be forthwith promoted. I am still anxiously

awaiting the specimens he promised to procure me, but even if they never come to hand I shall feel confident my Teutonic friend is in no way to blame, but has been deceived by his Caucasian acquaintance.

Batoum bears a terrible name, not only within its boundaries but in the outlying districts bordering on Turkey; here every cut-throat of Asia Minor and the Balkans finds a refuge, and murders in broad daylight are by no means infrequent. Not three months prior to my visit, a man leaving the bank at midday was dragged out of his carriage in a leading thoroughfare and robbed and murdered, and the criminals, I was informed, have never been discovered.

Only a week previous to my visit an outrage that found its way—in an inaccurate form—into the English papers, was perpetrated on this very railway. A clerk belonging to the Rothschild firm was known to be proceeding by a certain train to their extensive petroleum grounds, with (reputedly) 9000 roubles. The unhappy man instead of proceeding quietly without blast of trumpet appears to have permitted his important mission to be known, with the result that within an hour of Batoum he and one of his companions were

murdered by half a dozen Turkish cut-throats, all of whom left the train scot free. The sum total for which this deliberate murder was committed turned out to be only 2000 roubles (£200) and it is satisfactory to know that one of the assassins who foolishly lingered about Batoum has since been hanged, the remainder, however, escaping across the Turkish frontier.

The roads in proximity to the railway bear a far from enviable reputation, making travelling on the new highway—which extends for some 120 miles along the Caucasian range—absolutely dangerous. The lawless tribes inhabiting these almost inaccessible defiles—half Turkish in their origin, half civilised in their habits—defy every attempt at suppression or extermination. Periodical expeditions of Cossacks, powerless to penetrate beyond a certain point, invariably end in but qualified success, with the result that the district remains as dangerous as anything in the Balkans, and that twenty miles from the main line between Batoum and Tiflis, the life of any adventurous traveller is not worth a moment's purchase.

Although the Russian railways are for the most part well looked after, with two or three attendants attached to each corridor carriage, it was with

mingled feelings that one travelled at snail's pace throughout this long nocturnal journey ; with a six chamber revolver in one's pocket, and one eye constantly on the door handle, sleep was by no means as sound as it might have been, nor was the prospect increased by the incessant demand to show one's ticket, which although a "through one," as was well-known to the conductor—a terrible fellow, half Cossack, half guard, and armed to the teeth—was insisted upon after every stoppage, which occurred on an average twice an hour.

At length daylight made its appearance, and after a most unrestful journey, our train gradually "slowed down" and we approached the environs of Tiflis. It was now that the national squirt came into universal demand. The gaudy General with the white shirt, as spruce as ever, hurried towards the lavatory for his ablutions, to be followed by the Cossack with a predilection for flannel, till the train came to a standstill, simultaneous with an invasion of Armenian, Turkish, and mongrel Russian porters, who required the united efforts of myself, my Persian and my German friend, to resist. Everyone of these rascals is by birth and education a kleptomaniac. The huge plates on their breasts are mere snares, and

anything short of the strictest observation results in the loss of everything they leave the carriage with. Pursuing then our everyday tactics, brought by this time to a high degree of perfection, my Persian went on to the platform, whilst I remained behind until every article was safely deposited outside.

Proceeding at breakneck speed through a series of primitive streets, we in due course reached the Kaukass Hotel. It was my first experience of reckless driving over boulders and ditches, and in my innocence I believed we were in imminent danger; within a fortnight, however, my ideas changed, and I contemplated the streets of Tiflis as second only to the Boulevard des Capucines.

CHAPTER V

TIFLIS

AT length (31st October) we had reached a milestone on our long journey worthy of record, not only as being our last contact with civilisation till we reached Teheran, but as teeming with much that was unquestionably interesting. Tiflis—like a merit claimed for a certain much-advertised pickle—is a combination of sweet and bitter. Here are found Arabs, Turks, Armenians, Russians, Germans, Persians, French, but, so far as I could learn, not a single Englishman.

During my visit a delightful exhibition of the products of the Caucasus was in full swing in extensive grounds, with all the attractions of a *café chantant*, an imitation Moulin Rouge, and two military bands, and was well worth a visit any time between 5 P.M. and midnight.

The Armenian element unfortunately predominates to a considerable extent in this delightful town ; the leading tradesmen are Armenians, and the tailors, barbers, everyone likely to be required by a traveller in an emergency, belong to this detestable race. A barber who had contracted to call at my rooms in the morning for a rouble, persisted in asserting after the crop that he had distinctly stipulated for four, and gesticulated till it was necessary to forcibly eject him ; later on he called and expressed contrition, and accepted the despised coin, not forgetting to add that he had been "put up" to it by the Armenian hall porter, who had stipulated for a share. Another villain, who had evidently been "advised" on the subject by the coin vendor on the steamer, followed me day and night with a sack full of rubbish, all of which bore the unmistakable evidence of the sand mould ; he eventually took up a position outside my door until compelled ignominiously to follow the barber.

I here had my first experience of Russian banking ways. Thinking about 10.30 the slackest time for a very trifling business, I was so unfortunate as to find that it was—for want of a better word—the "snack" hour. Every cashier, book-keeper,

and clerk was munching cake, in which two vendors, moving behind the counters with baskets on their arms, were doing a brisk trade. Waiting patiently at the counter, I was disappointed to find that cigarettes ensued, and, whilst these were puffed unconcernedly, some fifty customers — hats in hand—were respectfully awaiting the pleasure of the smokers. The way of receiving coin is peculiarly primitive. Producing a frame of bars, with coloured beads (such as those with which children are sometimes taught the rudiments of arithmetic), the number of roubles to be received is displayed to you, and when satisfaction is nodded, you receive a paper to take to another room. Thus a transaction that would take three minutes in a London bank, extends here to something like half-an-hour.

The Cathedral is a very fine building, profusely decorated with massive gold and mosaic ornaments, and never having been present at the service of the orthodox Church, I purchased a bundle of tapers and passed an agreeable hour.

Listening to the choir, intercepted at intervals by solos from the officiating priest, I was much impressed by his magnificent cultivated bass voice. Standing in a commanding position, with a beard

literally down to his waist, I was electrified as his voice rolled forth, accompanied by the organ, and it was worth a journey to Tiflis if only to hear that rarest of artists, a basso capable of singing in tune—a phenomenon I have never observed except in the case of E. de Reszki. Tiflis is essentially a wicked place, but its wickedness has somewhat of a fascination, and nothing but the dread of the Kaflan Kuh and its snow-bound passes prevented my extending my sojourn indefinitely. The bazaar, a veritable Oriental one, is certainly not the least interesting quarter of the town. Astrachan skins may here be found in perfection at prices ranging from three to twenty roubles. Of these the Bokharas command the highest prices, whilst the Khorassan skins, though equally serviceable, are not as close-grained, and consequently in less demand for the universal headgear of the wealthier Persians. It is no uncommon thing for exceptionally high quality to command a hundred roubles for a black, and thirty roubles for a grey skin, whilst Khorassans of the same exceptional quality vary from thirty to fifteen roubles a-piece. There is no worse economy than buying a cheap Astrachan, for whilst the inferior article soon sheds the artificial gloss that Asiatic knavery temporarily

imparts to it, the better ones preserve nature's bloom till they literally fall to pieces. The steel industry in knives, swords, and daggers is also exceedingly brisk, and Damascus blades in every kind of formidable weapon may be relied upon as genuine. The police are in considerable force amidst this lawless surging mass, with revolvers conspicuously displayed, and a formidable hunting crop which they are not chary in applying to the shoulders of man or beast who in any way impedes the traffic.

The "Hotel de Londres" is far and away the best, but my Persian, for reasons best known to himself, insisted that we should do better at the "Kaukass." We may have gained possibly in the matter of price, but the rooms and cuisine left much to be desired. As in most Russian towns, the streets swarm with officers and men, augmented by the student class in grey overcoats, almost identical, though without shoulder-straps. To the uninitiated everyone in uniform must perforce be a soldier, but this was an error I soon overcame. Everyone apparently, messengers, hall-porters, clerks, students, affect "the military." It may therefore be interesting to future travellers in Russia to know that the shoulder-strap is the

official "hall-marking" which every soldier from the General downwards wears, and which no civilian, however otherwise magnificently attired, can presume to add to his uniform. Posting letters is a serious business in Russia. Stamps by no chance are ever to be procured in one's hotel, and to be sure of one's correspondence reaching the post office a personal trip is advisable in preference to consigning it to the tender mercies of the Armenian porter. If time is no object, an interesting half-hour may be passed in awaiting, hat in hand, one's turn to be served with a stamp, but if registration is contemplated a much longer time is essential, as not only have numerous declarations to be filled up, but if the chief clerk finds the address illegible, or there is not sufficient space for his copious official endorsements, he is quite as likely as not to refuse to accept it till a larger wrapper has been provided.

I nearly lost my train on leaving Tiflis through this red-tapeism, whose utility may be judged by the fact that a registered letter (happily of little value) that I posted on 5th November has not yet reached its destination. Posting and registration (especially registration), are no guarantee that one's letters are ever forwarded, for everything is

opened and, if considered objectionable, is burned. There is no remedy for this gross breach of faith, and it may be accepted as a fact that no "through bag" even ever crosses Russian territory without being burgled.

The following official incident will convince the most sceptical that my assertion is well founded. Some nine years ago, when the late Sir Robert Morier was British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, he had undoubted evidence that his despatches were periodically tampered with, and thinking that a request conveyed in a jocular vein would best meet the case and obviate a recurrence of the liberty, he wrote to the Cossack General, who was Director of Posts, asking him to kindly give instructions that when in future his despatches were opened, special care might be taken to have them securely refastened to obviate any possible risk of enclosures falling out. The reply in due course was hardly what had been anticipated, and was to the effect that in accordance with His Excellency's request, particular directions had been given that in future his letters should be carefully reclosed.

Throughout Persia this Russian custom is so thoroughly accepted, that many persons prefer to

send their letters by the longer route *via* Bushire and India. The present Viceroy of India, whose book on Persia is to this day recognised as a standard work, complained in the House of Commons, as far back as 1892, of this scandalous treatment of his private correspondence.

In Tiflis I had occasion most unexpectedly to resort to a tailor. At the Persian Consulate I learnt that etiquette demanded that anyone calling on a high official in Persia must be attired in frock coat and silk hat, and as it was possible that circumstances might necessitate my appearing not only before these magnates, but even in the sacred presence of the Shah, I determined to be prepared for all contingencies and forthwith ordered a frock coat. How shall I describe that marvellous product of Armenian genius! The breast, capacious and bevelled, resembled the prow of a Spanish galleon, whilst a roomy collar reaching high up the neck, reposed gracefully on my shoulders. Velvet was at first supplied, but after one inspection I insisted on its being ripped off. In fashion it was double-breasted—very double-breasted—and reached to within two inches of my ankles; a curtailment of two feet, however, was eventually agreed to reluctantly, and amid the murmurs of

whispered indignation at the sin of ruining a fashionable creation, the robe came into my possession. But its adventures were by no means ended, as will be found in a later chapter, suffice it for the present to state that within a week it was apparently none the worse for being submerged in a swollen river whilst reposing peacefully in my portmanteau, and that it was fearfully and wonderfully made. The outfit that a traveller is almost compelled to carry into unknown and semi-barbarous countries, has undergone considerable alteration within the past twenty years, and where flannels, dittoes, an overcoat and pot hat were once deemed sufficient, it is now absolutely necessary to be provided with evening clothes, frock coat, silk hat, and patent leather boots. How the hat is supposed to survive when its case has been splintered into matches, and how the allowance of fifty-six pounds of luggage is to contain all this addenda never enters the calculations of the Asiatic mind. If you desire to attend any function you must be literally dressed to death, if not you have nothing for it but to stay away. From my experience the latter course is infinitely the more preferable. An absolute essential to all travellers in Russia and Persia is a pair of goloshes. With streets that are never swept,

and which a shower of rain converts into a lagoon of mud, it is a point of honour not to ruin the carpets of those whose houses you may require to enter, and cavalry officers with spurs peeping over the tops, dainty maidens with raised skirts, old and young, all take refuge in these relics of a past age.

But our time was getting short, preserved provisions, tea, sugar, biscuits, a tea-pot, everything necessary for piggery for three weeks, had to be laid in, and having run the gamut of every possible extortion at Armenian hands, we bade a reluctant farewell to Tiflis, railways, and the modified civilisation I have described.

CHAPTER VI

FAREWELL CIVILISATION

(A Russian Post House)

RUSSIAN post houses, from their high sounding titles, are somewhat misleading, and may be best described as of the severe whitewash and plaster style of architecture, consisting of a passage with a door at each end, and one—possibly two—rooms on either side. One of these,—described as the public room, is free to all arriving in carts belonging to the Company, whilst the others are at the disposal of anyone willing to pay a rouble for privacy, an oil lamp, and a deal stretcher and chair—the only comfort to be procured being boiling water, for which an extra half-rouble is charged. Travellers must supply their own teapot, &c., and if unprovided with a

camp-bed or mattress must be content with the hard boards. The walls are adorned with printed notices in great profusion, but whether intimating that "cheques cannot be cashed" or relating to local regulations, my ignorance of the language prevented my ascertaining.

Our first experience of a halting-place was not reassuring. Leaving the railway two hours previously we had reached Agitafa about 10, intending after changing horses to travel through the moonlight night. In the public room, however, we met a Russian officer and soldier who warned us on no account to proceed farther. A marauding band, it appears, was known to be in the district and we should be wiser in remaining till daylight. I had been warned in Tiflis that the roads on the Russian frontier were by no means free of brigands, whilst on the other hand I had been told of various parties having lately passed through without molestation. So weighing the two contingencies, I elected that prudence was the best kind of valour, and ordering the inevitable urn—a huge brass vessel filled with charcoal, whose shape and dimensions have since been indelibly engraved on my memory—we settled down to tea and biscuits and a night bolt upright on our un-

comfortable stretchers. Sleep with such surroundings was a physical impossibility, and I found myself wandering times innumerable to the outer passage and contemplating from the doorless portal the weird prospect without. At the foot of the steps stood our wretched conveyance, whilst in the remote distance, straggling wolves were to be seen prowling cautiously about. Not a sound broke the silence, and the few snowflakes that were falling, added indescribably to the weird unearthly prospect; and so the first night passed slowly on, and with a sense of heartfelt relief we continued our journey at daylight, a journey that was to know no end for five and twenty weary days. The horses in this postal service, ostensibly a Company, but in reality a Government affair, are externally wretched screws, covered in many instances with cruel sores, but capable of covering the ground at a wonderfully good pace; flogged unmercifully, I have often felt disposed to turn the whip on the brutal driver, not that it would ameliorate except very temporally the poor dumb creature's misery. Nominally a two hours' stage, these ill-used brutes are liable to be turned out at a moment's notice if the chance arrival of another cart makes it necessary, and it may fairly

be assumed that until Nakhchvan is reached and roads in the ordinary acceptation of the term cease, their average journeys are from thirty to forty miles a-day. Travelling daily from 6 A.M. till dusk we passed various post houses and eventually reached Diligan.

Diligan, a picturesque village at the foot of a formidable mountain, is approached through scenery which for grandeur would be difficult to beat. Travelling for hours along the banks of a majestic river, one ascends gradually till it assumes the appearance of a streamlet tearing its way over boulders, at the foot of an almost fathomless precipice. Trees which one is aware are huge oaks, appear like shrubs, nor is their contemplation enhanced by the fact that the road is by no means a wide one, and that no sort of obstacle stands between one's carriage and a perpendicular drop of a thousand feet into eternity. One possibly became callous by this constant staring into space, and the initiation for what was in store for us may perhaps have been designed by a protecting providence, else I feel confident that neither I nor any human being—be his nerves ever so cast iron—could face, and sit complacently during, the incredible experiences of Diligan, and—

later on those met with, in the vicinity of Tabriz.

Four stallions abreast is the invariable complement to a post cart, and at the commencement of a stage, are in many instances fiery and almost uncontrollable. It was unfortunate that my first experience of a spirited team, should have been in this unsuitable locality. Leaving the hostlerie we had not proceeded far when one of the outsiders broke into a furious gallop, and kicking his heels into the air was soon over the trace. As the animals backed steadily towards the precipice, which the wheels were within a foot of, I jumped out on the "off" side, and in the safety of the road awaited what seemed an inevitable catastrophe. Meanwhile the driver, gesticulating, shouting, flogging, goaded them into a forward movement, and they dashed up the hill at breakneck speed. Half a mile hence I came up with the run-a-ways on whose harness the driver was expending considerable ingenuity by the aid of strings and bootlace. Buckles there are none in the ramshackle trappings to which the horses are yoked, and I have often stood appalled in the contemplation of a string on whose solidity our safety depended. One almost hesitates to ask the reader—accustomed

to the worst roads in England—to absolve one from exaggeration when giving a faithful description of these almost impassable tracts. Every law of dynamics was outraged daily ; where one was standing erect, one ought to have been on one's back, and where the wheels retained their ordinary position, they should by every axiom known to science, have been staring heavenwards. Yet one jolted through it somehow, and ruminating in this fashion we slowly ascended the hill. Here the panorama that opened up baffles description : hundreds of feet down on one side of a very narrow road, and towering above us into the clouds on the other, and the higher we ascended on our zig-zag course, still higher above us appeared the interminable black and white posts that a considerate Government had placed here and there. We were now at an altitude of some eight thousand feet, and our discomforts were increased by a blinding snowstorm (7th November) till we further ascended beyond the snow cloud to find the roads as slippery as a skating rink, and icicles the thickness of one's arm suspended from every rock. This intense misery—mental and bodily—lasted four hours, during which we continued ascending an apparently interminable mountain, and then we reached the

top to find the sun shining brilliantly. After a halt we commenced the still more perilous descent ; again we ran the gauntlet of frozen roads and blinding snowstorm, and although often compelled to press our feet against the opposite seat to prevent slipping off, we reached level ground about 4 P.M. Despite the assurance of a better post house two hours farther on, I insisted on remaining where I was, and in less than an hour was curled up half frozen in the inhospitable village of Saderack.

Saderack in the vicinity of the Turkish frontier has the misfortune of being periodically raided by unwelcome bands, and the conductor of the post house warned us to leave nothing on the window-sill, and especially to bolt the door. This consoling advice induced us to take extra precautions, which the discovery of various "peepholes" did not tend to discourage ; so resolving not to be caught napping, we lit some extra "dips," and with revolvers within reach proceeded to make a night of it.

In the morning our departure was considerably delayed in waiting for a relay of horses. Daylight inspired confidence so we took a stroll through the primitive village, and after watching the execution

of a calf and its subsequent retail in infinitesimal portions, we paid a visit to the local "Whiteley's," when finding ourselves in the vicinity of what appeared to be the police court, we stepped in and respectfully watched the administration of justice.

Our entrance apparently gave a fillip to the proceedings, and in an incredibly short space of time a dozen ragamuffins were dragged in and dragged out again. Without pretending to understand what it was all about, I should say, from a cursory glance, that the justice was worthy of the days of Tiberius, and that the "learned magistrate" was as pig-headed and self-opiniated as our own cherished stipendiaries. Glad to leave this unsavoury district we hurried through the next village of Norachin and eventually arrived at Iravan, the chief town, and residence of the Governor, on the Eastern Frontier of Russia.

CHAPTER VII

WE JOLT OUR WEARY LENGTH ALONG

AN eight hours' jolt brought us to Iravan, where everything appeared changed as by the wand of a magician. Western civilisation had given place to rank oriental barbarism ; churches had made way for mosques, and strings of camels with their turbaned drivers has superseded the patient ass and the vociferous Russian. Iravan, although an important frontier post and the residence of the Muscovite Governor, has retained all the characteristics of its former Turkish nationality. Apparently a picturesque town, we were absolutely precluded by the rivers of mud from obtaining a nearer view than was to be had from the verandah of the Caravansara, for cleanliness and municipal obligations are here unknown, and the dust that is never removed and is normally ankle deep, becomes

an impassable lagoon after a few showers. To wade through it, even with the essential goloshes, would be a physical impossibility, and the certainty of being splashed up to the eyes by the flocks of animals that flounder in every direction, decided me to seek refuge in the restaurant which our post house possessed. Cooking in these latitudes is conducted on the filthiest lines; if a fowl has to be disjointed it is done with both hands; if meat has to be cut it is held in one hand, and hacked with the other; everything is pawed by the dirtiest specimens of God's dirtiest creatures. Kabobs, I was informed, were the only things to be had, and after a considerable delay the half raw lumps of tasteless meat were "served." At this stage I was joined by a Cossack Lieutenant, and as he spoke nothing but his barbarous language, and I was innocent of even a word of Russian, our courtesies were confined to an interchange of grunts and nods, and the periodical clicking of glasses. Vodka (the glycerine and tannin stimulant) was the only beverage procurable, and as it happened to be 9th November, I ordered a special bottle, and explaining (through my interpreter) that it was the King of England's birthday, we drank and we drank "Ze Keenk" a

dozen times, till his English antipathies—certainly his carrying capacity—experienced a severe shock. I can see the worthy officer now, entangled in his sword belt, as he eventually tumbled into his cart, leaning forward and shouting “Ze Keenk,” and I feel confident that if by chance I ever meet him with a squadron of Cossacks, in the “last ditch” on the Persian Gulf, I shall procure instant recognition and every consideration by shouting “Ze Keenk.”

Leaving Iravan at daylight we continued our journey for ten hours to Nakhchvan, through as treeless and barren a country as can well be conceived. Around us, as far as the eye could stretch were mountains and hills, all of that peculiar shape suggestive of volcanic origin. In our immediate vicinity a great beehive a thousand feet high, in the far distance specks of the same shape no larger than sugar loaves. The expressive term “Everlasting Hills” never appealed more forcibly to me than when contemplating for hours these extraordinary freaks of nature; and the silence of the catacombs that pervaded everything, occasionally broken by the distant bells of an approaching caravan, awakened thoughts the most frivolous could not stifle. The concentrated rays

of the sun too, were so powerful that coats had to be discarded, and buffalo milk (when passing a village) freely indulged in, whilst the skin of my face peeled off, and one eye swelled and closed as from the effects of a blow, and it was a week before it regained its normal condition. For six dreary hours we traversed this crater of an apparently extinct volcano, till a rise that seemed interminable brought us to Nakhchvan. Perhaps one of the greatest trials and tests of forbearance a stranger has to submit to, is the impudence and over-bearing demeanour of the official in charge of the mail carts that are periodically met with. In Russia no carriage may pass the post, without permission ; if they elect to go slowly anyone in rear must submit to be suffocated, and any vehicle or caravan approaching from the opposite direction is ruthlessly driven on one side by the Cossack escort. Whips on these occasions are freely used, and often have I seen the lash curl round man and beast, who dared impede the Czar's mails. On one occasion I had the misfortune to come into direct antagonism with one of these insignificant officials. Having procured an exceptionally fast relay, it was not long before we found ourselves immediately in rear of His Majesty's post ; the driver like a meek

Russian jolted patiently behind whilst I, half choked by the dust, proceeded to remonstrate in pure Anglo-Saxon. For sometime no notice was taken of us, till at length "the Director," rising languidly from a bundle of sacks, after a patronising glance said, "Yes, you may pass," and thankful for small mercies we proceeded on our way rejoicing.

All along the road were numerous Cossack stations, and one could not but admire the exceptionally good irregular cavalry these splendid horsemen make. Mounted on their ratlike ponies, with rifle slung over the shoulder and formidable hunting crops in their hands, no obstacle deters them from the straight course, as clapping their spurless heels into the horses' sides, they start at full gallop, cracking their whips, and clearing the way with the delicacy of a city constable preceding the Lord Mayor.

It was between Iravan and Nakhchvan that Mount Ararat — beloved of children for its reminiscences of Noah's Ark and his impossible cargo—first bursts upon one. Towering in its 12,000 feet of altitude over all its neighbours, one first encounters it in the vicinity of Iravan, until working round steadily from West to East, one is

within easy distance of it at Nakhchvan. I was anxious to see it before sunrise, but forgetting for the moment that I was eastward of it, had the unexpected gratification of seeing the first rays light up its snow-capped heights, instead of seeing the sun rising behind it, which is supposed to be the desideratum of all tourists. Only two travellers—it is said, a Russian and a German—excepting the Noah family *père et fils*—have ever reached its summit, probably on account of its outlandish position rather than any climbing difficulties, which to me were not apparent. Within easy distance is the palace of the Armenian Archbishop (Chatokahegass) based on the legend that Noah after discharging cargo, proceeded to build a house, on the identical spot his Archiepiscopal successors have ever since resided in at Echmayatzin. It here became necessary to procure a conveyance capable of taking us to Tabriz; Russia and Russian post houses were henceforth things of the past, the Persian frontier was within six hours, and roads in the ordinary acceptance of the term unknown. By the courtesy of the Armenian post-house keeper (with an eye to the main chance), we were directed to a contractor, but not—as we afterwards learnt—before our friend had preceded

us. Here after considerable haggling, it was agreed that for fifty roubles he would provide a carriage and four horses to take us to Tabriz. Our Armenian, it appears, had instructed the man to ask seventy roubles ; that it would insult my dignity to be treated like a mean man (a favourite Armenian expression), adding, moreover, that if it came off he expected ten roubles. All this was retailed to me on the journey by Akbar, the very best driver I have ever sat behind, not excepting Malays, hansom-cab drivers, nor the best whip of any of our crack coaching clubs. This man, a Russian subject, a Mohammedan by birth, with a wrist like iron and absolutely nerveless, would drive where many would hesitate to follow. Precipices, swollen rivers, three-foot walls, a double ditch and bank were all alike to him, nor induced him to deviate one inch from his course. Oft-times I have seized him by the neck and ordered him to let me descend, only to find myself at the bottom at full gallop in perfect safety. At other times he would voluntarily suggest our descending, and what I saw on one occasion will not fade from my memory if I live a hundred years. We had ascended a steep incline, and arriving at the top he briefly said, "Get down." The road now dropped

almost perpendicularly, and at the end was a sharp turn, on one side an overhanging ledge of rock, on the other a precipice five hundred feet deep. The road, moreover, was so narrow as not to leave twelve inches on either side, and this is what I saw : Twisting the reins firmly round his left arm, he lashed the four stallions into a gallop down the hill ; then pulling the near rein with all his strength he turned the angle at lightning speed, and disappeared from view. When I reached the spot a few minutes later, he was calmly rolling a cigarette. This magnificent team of stallions it would be difficult to beat ; harnessed abreast, the two inner ones were stolid old stagers, that turned neither to the right nor yet to the left, but kept a steady strain on the traces from start to finish, whilst the outsiders were a pair of fiery greys, with flowing tails dyed vermillion, and scored over their entire bodies with Arabic hieroglyphics. These beautiful animals, without a vice in them, plunging from sheer animal spirits, if at first alarming soon became familiarised to us, and when, again approaching a boulder, they nimbly hopped it like cats, or all four took a stone wall neck and neck, I protest they would have done no discredit to Punchestown, or the "big lep beyant the grand stand." Considering there was not a

buckle in the entire harness that was not tied up with string, the marvel is, not that the fastenings occasionally broke, but that harness, cart, and passengers were not jolted into jellies. At some places the roads were so narrow and the defiles of so pronounced a V-shape that the two outsiders had to be unyoked, and the cart gritting against the sides dragged forcibly through. On certain stages amongst my experiences, mules were the only possible conveyance, but for vehicular traffic what I underwent during the next three weeks is sufficiently unique to bear narration.

Within an hour of leaving Nakhchvan our first experience was met with. Heavy rains had been falling of late, and until this particular day the rivers had been impassable. Contemplating it from the bank, Akbar decided it was possible ; anything, he contended, was better than ignominiously turning back. Our luggage, alas, was on a hinder foot-board ; half-way across we were up to our knees in water, and an inspection on the opposite bank discovered our belongings with a steady streamlet oozing out of every joint. Contemplation, however, would not mend matters, so hurrying on to Julfa, we floundered over boulders, ditches and

every imaginable obstacle till we reached the Eastern Frontier of Russia.

We had now traversed Russia from her Western to her Eastern boundary, upwards of 2000 miles in eleven days, exclusive of stoppages, of which five were on the Black Sea.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAND OF THE LION AND THE SUN

THE approach to Julfa is past a series of wooden huts, after which one finds oneself in a large barrack square, on one side of which are the official residences and Cossack barracks, and on the other the Custom house.

One could almost have imagined oneself at Ascension, so similar is it in every respect with its bleak sandy soil, its unmistakable air of officialism, and an almost tropical sun overhead, one thing alone seemed wanting—the bluff and hearty welcome of the British naval officer.

It is a stringent regulation—why, heaven only knows—that no one is permitted to cross into Persia after 3 P.M. It was now close on that hour, and, moreover, Sunday, and with the prospect of roughing it unless some expedition was made,

I knocked at the chief official's door. After my name and object had been sent in, I was informed that His Excellency was at dinner, and would see me in half-an-hour ; so sitting on a bench I lit my pipe and awaited the great man.

In due course I was escorted to the opposite shed, where the gate being opened six inches, we were informed that only one was admitted at a time. Entering the sacred precincts I found our luggage all ready for inspection, and shortly afterwards the chief official arrived. It was with feelings of relief I observed his white moustache standing out prominently over an extremely rubicund face ; "Thank heavens," I thought, "he has dined freely, surely he can never have the energy for an exhaustive rummage." And my conjecture proved correct, for after a few hurried questions the permit was granted, and we proceeded to cross into Persia.

Russia is equally solicitous in her attentions to strangers entering and leaving her gates, and having taxed everything possible on crossing one frontier, repeats the operation on one's recrossing the other. Meanwhile the news of two travellers having been permitted to cross had got noised abroad, and a score of Persians sought a similar

privilege. One man in my immediate vicinity, after frequent obeisance, produced two lemons and tendered them to His Excellency. I saw the little eyes over the white moustache twinkle, and anon a sheep's eye was cast in my direction, and although in my delicacy I appeared not to be noticing what was going on, the lemons did not change hands. There is little doubt as to their destination had I not been present.

The boundary between Russia and Persia is a muddy streamlet—the Arras—not two hundred yards wide; a flat-bottomed tub of some four yards square, propelled by poles, is the means of transit, and in a wonderfully short space of time, horses, cart, ourselves, and a dozen natives were drifting across to the land of "the Lion and the Sun."

In this primitive country landing-stages are unknown, so wading through mud ankle-deep, we gained the shore and proceeded to the Custom house. Bare-footed officials in ragged uniforms now enquired whether there was anything we "would like" to declare, and being assured there was nothing—except the rouble I smuggled into his hand—the formality was ended and we proceeded to the caravansara.

Persia of late years under Russian tuition has made great strides in the art of fleecing travellers ; everything, more or less, is supposed to be taxed, and in addition a poll-tax of 10s. is imposed on every person entering the kingdom. The caravansara (as post-houses must now be called) was an exceptionally grand building. Ascending a stair-case as steep as the Monument we found ourselves in spacious apartments heavily carpeted, and altogether the best accommodation we had met with since leaving Odessa. The reason was soon explained. Built specially for the occasion of the Shah's late visit to Europe, in it he slept a night, and on his contemplated visit this year there is little doubt it will again be honoured as the Royal residence.

The last progress of his Persian majesty is sufficiently interesting to justify narration. As is well known his antipathy to the sea is simply insurmountable. Discarding, therefore, the short route *via* Ensalie, with its subsequent twenty-four hours on the Caspian Sea, he decided that fifteen days over the break-neck roads I have recently travelled was infinitely preferable.

The progress was attended with all the barbaric pomp that a diminished exchequer would permit ;

for weeks previously battalions of workmen levelled the highway, fields for the nightly encampment were drained and enclosed, till on the eventful day, preceded by 500 horsemen and accompanied by 1000 courtiers and camp followers, Muzaffar-ed-din advanced by easy stages to his Paradise of Paris. Nightly the monarch reposed under a canopy of silk, daily he approached nearer his goal by some thirty miles, till the territories of his good brother, protector and ally, were reached, and displays likely to tickle an oriental appetite were lavishly indulged in. 500 Cossacks preceded the royal cortége for a distance of two miles, everything was ruthlessly lashed off the road, and thus with due pomp the Persian monarch reached St. Petersburg. The description—as it was given me—reads like the progress of Duke John of Burgundy when he started on his disastrous campaign against Switzerland, and it requires but little effort of imagination to anticipate how different another progress may be a few years hence, when “Holy Russia” has elaborated her plans and the harvest is ripe for the sickle.

Painful, moreover is it to contemplate, that, whilst all these superfluous manifestations of goodwill were being indulged in, the Czar’s engineers

were at the very time surveying the entire Kingdom and preparing the way for cutting the ancestral ground from under the feet of his confiding guest.

Like Browning's "Cleon"—modernised—it were well if the Shah and his councillors realised in time that:

"Russia is on the march to crush out like a little spark
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale, and thee at once."

Apropos of the Shah's antipathy to the sea, a member of his suite gave me an amusing description of a trip on the King of the Belgians' yacht during his last stay at Ostend. The day was unusually fine, the sea was exceptionally calm, and King Leopold suggested a two hours' cruise. Nothing was omitted to give *éclat* to the fête, but barely had the yacht left her moorings than the Shah—realising that a life on the ocean wave had an entirely distinct motion from that of a motor, suggested that the cruise might be curtailed. To have hesitated would have been discourteous on the part of his host, whilst to his courtiers the consequences, once back in Teheran, would certainly have been risky, and so the good ship

floated back the sea way she had made, and aquatic trips henceforth had no place in the Ostend programme.

Since writing these lines, His Majesty has undertaken his second projected trip to Europe ; but the terrors of his terrible experience at Ostend decided him on not imperilling his precious life by crossing the Caspian, and a special road has been made along its shores whereby he can proceed from Ensalie to Baku on *terra firma*.

Proceeding to examine our belongings, it was gratifying to find that the result of our immersion was not as disastrous as it might have been. Clothes certainly were thoroughly soaked, but two hours of a Persian sun remedied the ill effects, and an eventual ironing by the Tabriz "Poole" restored everything to its normal condition. Marvellous to relate, an album of theatrical beauties escaped uninjured and now occupies an honoured position in the Crown Prince's harem at Tabriz ; whilst a few novels that were packed alongside it were reduced to pulp, a box of Seidlitz powders having exploded, possibly under the impression that some monster was under treatment. Meanwhile, dinner, which we had ordered two hours previously, was served, and my first experience of Persian cookery

and its indescribable aroma, was duly made. This diabolical odour asserts itself everywhere. Milk, direct from the buffalo or cow, bread, hot water, flesh, fruit, all leave the same hateful impression on nose and palate. For want of a better name, I christened it "honi soit," for, though convinced that its origin was traceable to dirt, I felt it would be fairer to give it the benefit of the doubt, and leave to analysts the duty of locating it. As I write, this odour of "honi soit," is powerfully before me, and despite the sweet incense arising from a remnant of Bewlay's shag, it still insists on asserting itself.

Barely had our potent repast been removed, when I was informed that a deputation desired to pay their respects, and, introduced by the caravan-sara keeper, three gentlemen in ragged uniforms entered the room. Leaving their slippers at the door, they advanced at an angle of forty-five degrees, and being respectively seized by the hand, they began to pump me.

"Why had I come to Persia?" "Was I going to see the Shah?" "How long did I intend to stay?"

It was mere idle curiosity, and being answered according to its merits, the consensus of opinion

clearly was that I was in some way associated with the Shah's prospective journey, and that it behoved them in every way to facilitate my plans. At this stage, I must have casually explained as the reason why the Shah had not come to London, that the British Court was in mourning for the Duke of Edinburgh, and, although probably they had no notion who the Duke of Edinburgh was, these three humbugs rose one after another and expressed their snivelling sympathy for the British nation in general. Turning to the question of the safety of the road, of which I had heard conflicting opinions, and the advisability of procuring a cavalry escort, I was assured that although instances of highway robbery did occasionally occur, attacks on Europeans were absolutely unknown. I was advised, however, to forego a very comfortable Astrachan hat, which might lead to my being mistaken for an Armenian! and to revert to some headgear that would unmistakably proclaim the Englishman. Happily I possessed a cap with a cloth peak, and terribly nautical, such as the London 'Arry, bent on conquest, dons on Margate pier; and thanking my friends for the hint, felt equal to a dozen Persians. Not that I relied entirely on the cap, for in my pocket a very effec-

tive "Colt" had reposed peacefully ever since I loaded it on entering the train at Batoum, besides which there was Akbar, who was *not* a Persian, and my interpreter who was.

Many instances had been given me of attacks on travellers, but after some months' study of Persian character, I am satisfied that open hostilities are not their forte. Often have I watched a protracted street row, in which pushing, shouting, and occasionally hair pulling are recognised tactics, but in no instance have I seen a blow.

Daylight saw us again on the road, if such a prostitution of the word can be applied, and towards dusk we halted at Taza-Kand, a mud village of forbidding exterior; and, in the absence of hotel or caravansara, we spent our first night in a Persian hut.

CHAPTER IX

TAZA-KAND

(Dreadful Experiences)

PULLING up at a mud hovel that Akbar said was the only available shelter, we were soon surrounded by a gaping crowd, not one of whom had probably ever seen a European before. They stared in admiration, first at my nautical cap and then at my briar pipe, shrieking with laughter as it rested in my mouth, whilst some of the less timorous cautiously touched it, and roared all the louder. Meanwhile the throng had increased so considerably that, entering the hut, we proceeded to count our belongings. Akbar had warned us on no account to leave them for an instant, for although ostensibly cloth weavers, our hosts were professional thieves of a very pronounced type. Bedsteads, it is needless to say, we had bade a

long farewell to ; mattresses we did not possess, so laying our rugs on the earth floor we ventured to enquire if food was procurable. A fowl was there-upon suggested, and forthwith the entire family gave chase till a hopeful hen was run to earth, and almost simultaneously her trunkless head and feet were being fought for by the pariahs that infest the villages. These dogs undoubtedly have wolf blood in them ; literally wild, they resemble their savage progenitors in head, shape, colour, and disposition ; no stranger is safe in their vicinity, and as to stepping out of the hut after dusk, it is as much as one's life is worth. With such hopeful surroundings we proposed to contend till daylight. Dogs, and indeed all animals, except for food, are forbidden to be killed by the Koran, hence throughout the length and breadth of Persia four or five of these dangerous pests are to be found at every hut. Never fed, never admitted within doors, and as ferocious as anything of the canine species can well be, the nuisance attains its zenith perhaps in Teheran. Every few yards there may be found a wretched bitch in the last degree of emaciation, surrounded by a litter of pups, varying from three days to three months, yelping from sheer hunger. When it is remembered that it is a meteorological

fact that the rainfall in Persia never exceeds thirty days in the year, and none falls for seven months on end, it seems incredible that these pariahs, with every streamlet dried up, can eke out an existence, and although one occasionally sees a corpse of one that has been run over, they increase and multiply to an alarming extent.

Horses incapacitated for further work by old age or accident are invariably led out of the city gates, and eye witnesses have described to me the hideous sight of a score of dogs and vultures awaiting the supreme moment.

The hag who now came in to trim an oil wick, did not inspire me with much relish for my dinner ; the "honi soit" odour seemed to be wafted from her person, while the indigo dyed hands, and the execution of the bird that I had witnessed did the rest, and I fell back on biscuit and the inevitable chi (tea). In the centre of our room was a hole some eighteen inches in diameter, and the remembrance of stories where travellers have been mysteriously made away with, and the conviction that we were being constantly watched from various corners, decided us not to risk even the semblance of sleep ; the vermin, moreover, that covered walls and floor, required our constant vigilance, and

lighting every dip in our basket we patiently awaited daylight. Towards midnight, however, we were considerably relieved by the arrival of two soldiers, whom we proceeded to welcome with the most gushing effusion. The one was good enough to explain that he was a colonel of artillery (they were both literally in rags) and was proceeding to escort a caravan that was going towards Urmiah. Inviting him to enter our room, he proceeded to remove his boots, and having deposited his rifle in the corner, abandoned himself to eating. I asked him various questions as to his weapon—an unusual one for an artillery colonel—which was of the most obsolete pattern, and was staggered at the ignorance he displayed at every step ; he assured me it carried three miles, but that there were some in Teheran of considerably longer range, and then turning his attention to our hosts, proceeded to inform them, “ You dogs, and sons of dogs, stop your noise, or I ’ll turn you out of the house.”

The speech was encouraging—he was the very man we were looking for, and I handed him a small bottle of vodka.

At daylight the hole in the floor turned out to have a very innocent but nasty mission. Entering

by ones and twos, the entire household sat round the opening, and with feet dangling inside warmed themselves for the day. As a matter of fact it was the family oven, and I offered up a silent thanksgiving to heaven that I had abstained from partaking of their bread. It was during this "house warming" that all our vigilance was required, yet despite every precaution the stitches of my bag had been cleverly cut, and the teapot moreover had disappeared. Shouting for the "Colonel," I laid the facts before him, who threatening to burn the place down unless immediate restitution was made, it slowly made its appearance from inside the old hag's blouse, and after a plunge in the hottest water procurable was safely deposited in our basket.

Daylight having now sufficiently vindicated itself, we proceeded to pay our reckoning on the scale we had laid down, namely one and six for room and hot water, and a shilling extra for the fowl.

"Pay me," shouted the man.

"No, me," piped the hag.

"It was my fowl," yelled a third.

So placing the bone of contention on the floor we proceeded on our ten hours' jolt.



CHAPTER X

TABRIZ

TABRIZ is the second important town in Persia, and has a population of 200,000 souls. Like most Persian towns its centre is a covered bazaar, with branches extending in every direction, and a covered way encircling the entire extent. Beyond this are the various quarters, occupied respectively by the European, Armenian, and Mohammedan communities. It is simply a straggling mass of mud houses, built for the most part in quadrangles facing inwards ; the streets, which have no names and exactly resemble one another, are often so narrow that two camels cannot pass abreast, and when, as often occurs, a caravan of some two hundred of these stupid beasts are passing through them locomotion is impeded to a dangerous extent. Entering the town, I expressed

my disappointment to my Persian at the architectural merits of this important city, as he had persistently been describing it to me. "Wait till you see the European quarter," he replied, "you'll be astonished." I did, and confess I was.

The Valiahd (or Crown Prince) is Governor of the Province, and from opinions I heard expressed in reliable quarters, gives himself great airs in the treatment of Foreign Consuls, and is likely to follow in the footsteps of his enlightened grandfather. I was assured that he had lately intimated to Consuls calling on him that they would be required to remain standing, and on leaving to retire backwards. Where he learnt these western tokens of flunkeyism it is difficult to say, and if the Consuls consent, and their Governments approve, no great harm need be apprehended. At the date of my arrival (14th November) this high and mighty prince was on one of those expeditions, which every Governor has periodically to resort to, by way of raising funds. The start, however, was by no means an auspicious one, and at one time it was a question whether the expedition would take place at all. Escorted by five hundred

horsemen, and probably by an additional thousand courtiers and camp followers, this unhappy Prince realised that the essential funds were wanting. His first application was to the disinterested friend of his country—the Russian Consul General, but that official, with a caution that does him credit, expressed a leaning towards some kind of security, and suggested the guarantee of the Minister of Customs. That functionary, however, not “seeing his way,” to quote a hateful phrase in vogue in London, the negotiation fell through, and His Imperial Highness was compelled to accept a loan of £3000 from the bank of Persia, at 9 per cent. The marauding expedition came to a close a few weeks later, and we will assume the loan has been honourably redeemed.

The Russian Consul is said to be all-powerful here, he or his son seldom allowing a week to pass without a visit to the palace, and are occasionally permitted to accompany the Prince on a shooting expedition. The Consulate also makes an imposing display; a dozen Cossacks lounge at the gate from morning to night, and no opportunity is lost of impressing on the native mind the power and greatness of Russia. The salary of £2000 a year enables all this, and on the Czar’s birthday a

firework display, worthy of Crystal Palace Brock's benefit, invariably marks the event.

The British Consulate, on the other hand, can bear no comparison to its Russian rival; the salary attached to it, a modest £900, is inadequate to maintaining the dignity of England, let alone fireworks, and this in the very town of all others where no opportunity should be lost of impressing the native mind. Asiatics, as most people are aware, talk at considerable length in the bazaar, and it is a fact there is no denying, that during the past two years no opportunity has been lost of pointing out England's decay and insignificance, as instanced by the Boer War. Whence these rumours emanate, it is not difficult to conjecture, nor would verbal refutation go for much, though even that is not forthcoming, in the absence of ocular demonstration, and if our legislators could be induced to see it in the same light, they would make a splash and keep it up in every town in Persia. One might ask, why not a guard of Indian troops, as a counter-blast to the Cossacks? Why not an extra £200 a year to the Consul, if only to purchase fireworks for the King's birthday and for providing a bean feast for the nobility and gentry of Tabriz? On my arrival the British

Consul was on leave, and no demonstration, I was told, marked the 9th of November. This was an error, and a serious one, though probably unavoidable if the funds were officially begrudged. Irrespective of all this, our Consuls have a difficult duty to perform, and read by the light of what is public opinion in Teheran, are not supported and encouraged by the potentates of Downing Street.

One of the most striking characters in Tabriz engaged on mission work, purely on his own account, and receiving no remuneration from any of our wealthy institutions for the propagation of the gospel, is the Mullah, Mooshie Benjamin. This holy man, I cannot more fitly describe him, has laboured night and day for forty years ; literally penniless, and often denying himself to supply food to more needy converts amongst his Mohammedan countrymen ; often beaten unmercifully and frequently stripped of his clothing, this worthy man may be seen daily, and all day, in the bazaar and in the most fanatical parts of the town, preaching but one doctrine, labouring for but one cause. Unable to speak but a few words of English, he showed me, through my interpreter, certain books in Persian manuscript that he had translated to benefit his converts ; amongst these

was an account of his life and the vicissitudes he had gone through ; another I believe was showing up the heresies of the Koran. I promised him that on my return I would bring his case to the notice of those able—if willing—to befriend a worthy object, and further his views by having these books printed for circulation in Persia, and anyone so disposed on writing to me (to the care of my publishers) shall receive the fullest information. The acting British Consul described him to me as the only honest Nestorian he had ever met during his thirty years' residence in Persia, and everybody, high and low, European and native, has nothing but good to say of this undoubtedly sincere Christian.

A wave of fanaticism is apparently passing over Persia, instigated doubtless by the Mullahs, who, acting under instructions as described in Chapter XVIII. have lately prohibited the introduction of the Holy Scriptures into the country, and a large consignment has within the last few months been seized by the Custom authorities in the Persian Gulf, in accordance with an obsolete Statute that has not been put into force for 100 years.

The persecution of converts to Christianity is by no means rare in Northern Persia ; an authenticated

instance was brought to my notice that occurred in Tabriz not three years ago. A wealthy Khan suddenly embraced Christianity, and within a week was thrown into prison ; for months he was kept half starved, with periodical floggings and other tortures, and as he persisted in adhering to his convictions, was undoubtedly privately made away with ; at any rate he was never seen again. I shall describe later on the fearful underground dungeon where the murder probably occurred.

The principal industry of Tabriz is carpet-making, and although not so important as that at Sultanabad, has unquestionably been brought to a very high state of perfection. I have never seen anything more comic and yet so interesting as some twenty urchins of from six to ten years of age, perched on planks ten feet from the ground, and stitching (thirty-eight to the minute) at a suspended canvas, whilst their instructor—a lad of fifteen—shouted from the floor the various colours required for the pattern ; and when it is remembered that these productions are often copies of celebrated tapestries, and the children work on the back of the carpet, the accuracy of their mechanical labour is absolutely incredible. The work I saw

in Mr. Stevens' factory was of the highest description of art, and no picture, tapestry, or pattern, however intricate, but can be accurately reproduced. Around me I was shown "orders" in various stages of completion, from America, India, and Europe, that I was credibly informed would run into £1000 and more. A copy of the famous carpet from the Mosque of Ardabil, which is now at the South Kensington Museum, and which is specially described in Mr. Mumford's work on Oriental rugs, has been made in this establishment. The design, flowering and colouring of the original, are described by him as unique, and a minute comparison of its painted copy with the specimen I saw in Tabriz showed a marvellous degree of accuracy in every detail. Only natural and vegetable dyes are used, and to this may be attributed the lasting colours that appear indelible in Persian carpets and rugs. Cochineal, madder root, indigo, walnut, and pomegranate husks are the principal dyes in use. The use of British wool in these manufactures is, however, impossible, for although the results after a short experience were all that could be desired, the high cost of importation rendered their continued use impossible. The new Persian tariff, after its approval

by Russia, will no doubt remedy the present injustice to British manufactures.

The new Russian road about to be constructed from Tabriz to Teheran on the one side and to Julfa on the other, in accordance with one of the clauses of the new £850,000 Loan, will still further handicap British enterprise and facilitate the importation of Russian goods.

Judging by the apparent impossibility of ever wearing out an ordinary Persian carpet that costs from £6 to £20, or even a "Geleem" (£1 to £2), it can hardly be denied they are infinitely cheaper than the rubbish that is procured in Tottenham Court Road or Westbourne Grove, no matter at what "enormous sacrifice."

Mr. Stevens, I must explain, is an institution in Tabriz ; when the British Consul General goes on leave he is the *locum tenens*, in addition to which he is banker, manufacturer, and general agent ; he is, moreover, hospitality itself and English to the backbone. Not to know Mr. Stevens is not to know Tabriz.

Hotel accommodation is limited to a hovel kept by an Armenian, where I learnt from the sad experience of five days that the staple products are boiling water, for the inevitable *chi* (tea), and

native bread, Russian beer, and vodka ; luxuries such as musty eggs and a native pillau involving an hour's delay till procured from the bazaar. Alas that I refused the Acting Consul General's hospitable offer, to turn over bodily to the British Consulate. I had settled down, however, in my shanty, my kit was unpacked and being overhauled, and as a general welcome awaited me for every meal I chose to accept, I elected to see it through.

It may interest those who indulge in controversy as to whether tea is injurious or not, to know that during the past six months I have drunk more tea than in any ten years of my life, and that should I live to return to England it is my intention to destroy my teapot.

The Imperial Bank of Persia is the most solvent institution in the country ; with its head office in London it has hitherto enjoyed a well-earned monopoly, and possesses the privilege of issuing a paper currency. But Russia is not partial to any monopolies except her own, and at the present moment there is a branch of the Russian State Bank in every town in Persia. Every bank has a military guard—not so alert or smart perhaps as the guard over the Bank of England, or in Dublin,

but nevertheless a guard. No sentry is posted, but on the approach of any stranger suggestive of European origin, and fairly dressed, a soldier will seize a musket and give a "present" that would shock a drill-sergeant; an exceptionally well-dressed man, or a carriage, and the guard "turns out."

During my afternoon wanderings I entered many Persian and Armenian houses, and was amused by the similarity of the pictorial decorations that adorned the walls. "Christian Mission" prints vied with Palais Royal daubs for mastery, and biblical illustrations were huddled amidst semi-nude actresses of Parisian origin. Here and there a portrait of our late Queen was to be found, and now and then one of Mr. Gladstone or Charles Dickens. Where the owner desires to be considered a man of culture, his Armenian figure and Nestorian physiognomy might be seen, clad in a "misfit," with a thumb stuck jauntily into his vest, and a hat over his ears, in a photograph of the Euston Road type. Occasionally these interesting figures were accompanied by those of their children, with a card intimating that the parent's name was Jeremiah, and that of the tadpoles, Homer and Milton.

I had determined to visit the prison, and following the Asiatic custom of taking coins for distribution amongst the unhappy captives, I traced my steps to a money-changer in the bazaar. It had been my intention to devote five shillings to this work of charity, but I am not a professional weight-lifter, and I was compelled to reduce it by half. A kran, which is the universal coin, represents fourpence halfpenny, and to each kran there are twenty shahi; determined not to be baulked I purchased a tablecloth, put down the equivalent of half-a-crown, and with my hundred and forty coins proceeded on my mission. Entering the *place d'armes* where an imposing park of artillery stood, consisting of rusty brass guns stuffed with hay, I first contemplated the palace, standing in a kind of North Woolwich gardens, and directed my steps towards the prison on the opposite side. On the outside lounged a dozen keepers in ragged uniforms, some with muskets, some without; amongst them was a terrible looking being clad in scarlet from head to foot, with a knife resembling a butcher's stuck in his belt. This was the executioner. The head-keeper now advanced, and expressing the honour he would have in conducting me through the establishment, pre-

ceded me into a small courtyard. This in its turn led through a door—so low as almost to necessitate going on all fours—into an inner and smaller enclosure. Here no other door 'was visible, but a second glance at the earth floor showed in the corner a huge slab heavily barred and padlocked. Unfastening it with an enormous key, the slab was raised, disclosing three or four steps dug out of the earth. I was invited to descend, but the effluvia that arose was so dreadful, the certainty of being covered with vermin so apparent, to say nothing of catching fever or small-pox, that I hesitated to comply. Then followed a scene I shall never forget. Standing on the threshold, the head-keeper shouted, "Mahoud," and an emaciated wretch, half naked and manacled, tottered up; blinking his eyes even in that subdued light, he asked for bread, or tobacco, or money, and I doled out a handful of shahis into the trembling hand. "Murad," "Abdul," "Anzalie," and so on, were then respectively shouted out, till the entire thirty odd living beings had received their respective doles. One poor wretch on emerging, in the apprehension that his release had come, jumped on to the upper step, only to be thrust back with a heavy cudgel, and then the slab was dropped with

a bang, and the seething mass of corruption and misery was left to darkness and meditation, God only knows how hopeless. Some of these wretches have been thus incarcerated for years. One man, in reply to the question, would answer one year, others two, four, even longer. Once in, their release is a question of caprice, they may be forgotten only to die there, or, if an example is needed, be brought out for public execution in the Square. One man that was pointed out to me had attacked and robbed a Customs House official a few months previously on the very road I had recently travelled between Julfa and Taza-gand. He was subjected to some torture or to a flogging daily, and on the Valiaht's return would assuredly be executed, and probably by this time his soul is in Paradise.

The sight I had seen haunted me for days—the gaunt, bloodless, half-dead spectres, bound hand and foot, and in their grave clothes, recalled to my mind a grand but awful picture I once saw of “Lazarus, come forth.” God pity all such without hope in the world !

Public executions are of various kinds, the ordinary one consisting of the man in red seizing the victim from behind, pulling his head back,

placing his fingers in his nostrils, and cutting his throat. The death sentence in Teheran is practically unknown, for the Shah, with all his faults, is adverse to the shedding of blood ; in the provinces, however, it is different, and everything depends on the caprice of the Governor. Khans, Princes, and those capable of paying for the luxury, are quietly spirited away, and permitted to take poison.

In an upper room with barred windows, without glass, prisoners of a higher class are incarcerated. It was in this identical room that a brother-in-law of the Shah's had been recently confined, but prior to my visit had been secretly removed elsewhere. His offence was participation in the recent incipient revolt—first reported and subsequently contradicted in the English papers, but which nevertheless took place—that arose out of the well-grounded murmurings as to the sale of their country to Russia, and further taxation to enable the Shah to carry out his projected visit to Europe. Anything likely to militate against this cherished dream of Mouzaffar-ed-Din had better be kept to oneself, and it is doubtful whether even an advertisement in the *Times* would ever again produce this princeling in the flesh.

During my stay in Tabriz I received consider-

able attention from the manager of the Indo-European Telegraph Company. It was quite like meeting a friend one had once met in some outlandish quarter, and being received by him in his own house, to see the wires that had accompanied us night and day from Batoum, now 1000 feet above our heads taking a short cut across mountain tops, and anon 200 feet below us cutting off a corner, here peacefully clustered within the compound only to burst forth on the further side to continue their solitary way to Teheran, and thence to Bombay and Calcutta. One could not help becoming quite attached to these silent emblems of civilisation, so loyal in their attendance, so smart in their appearance, and such a contrast with their cast iron poles and trim wires, to their slovenly Russian rivals on crooked pines with dishevelled wires, which marching side by side throughout Russia challenged comparison by their proximity.

Roads, or rather their absence, is the curse of Persia, and locomotion is limited to springless carts, mules, asses, and camels. Russia for her own good reasons does not intend Persia to advance, till she is ready to show the way ; as one approaches Teheran, however, a considerable

improvement is apparent, and from Kasvin, holes and double ditches are comparatively rare on the high road. What a reflection all this is on European civilisation, and the inability of all Europe to open up Persia, with her wealth of mineral treasures, in lead, copper, tin, antimony, zinc, iron, petroleum, coal, salt, sulphur, naphtha, turquoise and pearls, and all because Russia forbids the building of railways that could cover the distance—even at Chatham and Dover speed—in sixty hours, which now takes fifteen to twenty days, and is often impassable.

CHAPTER XI

A DAY'S SHOOTING

BUT if Tabriz is unspeakably vile within its walls, it has redeeming features of the highest class in its immediate neighbourhood. Game of every kind is to be found in great profusion, including partridge, wild duck, snipe, plover, grouse, quail, bustards, flamingo, and hares, whilst a five hours' ride brings one into the haunts of moufflons, ibex, wild boar, leopards, hyenas and bears.

The moufflon or wild sheep, with enormous horns of the Highland ram sort, save that they spring from the centre of the forehead, are not very plentiful, and are only to be found in herds of ten to forty on the Sahend mountains; they are, moreover, very shy, and cover immense distances daily, so that approaching them or

discovering their whereabouts is a matter of considerable uncertainty. During the rutting season, however, which extends from October to December, they may occasionally be met with within a few hours of Tabriz. The ibex on the other hand is by no means migratory in its habits, and once having found a rocky peak, in proximity to water and pasture, appears never to leave it.

Wild-fowl in great profusion are to be found almost everywhere around the town, but a magnificent lake of some two miles in extent on the road to Teheran, whose entire length I traversed a few days later, appeared to me the ideal of a sportsman's paradise. Hardly noticing our approach, the water and banks literally teemed with flocks of ducks, plover, teal, and, here and there, flamingo; the mallards, which I had never seen before, were of a dark red plumage, with a black rim round the neck and a few white feathers on the breast; twice the size of the ordinary duck, they rose heavily and flew slowly, only to re-alight a hundred yards farther off. Their flesh I was told was by no means good eating, and was of a strong musk-like flavour, and anyone who has smelt a musk-rat is not likely to test it by personal experience. Plovers of all kinds, from the noisy

green plover to the grey and golden species, flew over and around us, whilst the wily flamingo—that so few have ever succeeded in bringing down—true to its traditions, was up and away without waiting to discover our business. Certainly if I lived in Tabriz, I would dig a pit on either side of the lake, on the principle in vogue in Highland lochs ; with a gun in each, sport and recreation would be insured from sunrise to sunset, for there is no other such expanse of water for miles, and the shooting of the lake, two or three days at a time, at intervals of a month or two, would assuredly not scare away these ancient freeholders from their pastures. The red-legged partridge—ininitely better eating than specimens I have tried in the Cape and Mediterranean—are to be found everywhere on the mountains. Rocky soil is apparently their favourite cover, and the popular native custom is to stalk them, behind a moving screen, and pot them on the ground. The grey partridge though met with, is extremely rare ; grouse—though I could not ascertain if the same as the British bird—are plentiful in the spring and summer, whilst snipe and hares are to be kicked up in every direction ; during winter the latter may be shot daily in almost every garden in Tabriz.

It was to Mr. Stevens' son that I was indebted for the following delightful experience, and it was under the auspices of the young shikari himself that I spent my only enjoyable day during my compulsory stay in Tabriz. We had left the town the evening before to make a night of it in his shooting-box, near the village of Luganate, about four hours from Tabriz. The road, which for difficulties dwarfed anything I had before experienced, was in its entire extent a series of ups and downs, and even the sure-footed mules were frequently sliding on their haunches, whilst I—I am not ashamed to admit—in many tight corners resorted to a safe, if undignified, progress on all fours. Starting at 4 A.M. on the following morning in a sharp frost, and the moon in its last quarter, we reached our hunting ground after a walk—say scramble—of little over an hour, and halted on the top of a snow-capped mountain.

Looking in every direction through his binoculars, my companion descried, half-a-mile off, what he pronounced to be a herd of moufflons. Working round to the windward of them, he decided to stalk them alone, and considerately posted me where they were almost bound to pass within range. Climbing (as he told me on the way home)

towards a series of rocks where he hoped to have found them immediately below him, he was mortified to discover they had moved at least 200 yards. Within range, however, of a long and lucky shot stood a splendid buck on outpost duty, and, realising that it was now or never, he aimed carefully, and had the gratification of seeing his victim first leap into the air, and then disappear behind a rock. Arriving on the spot, however, he discovered that, though badly wounded, his quarry had got away; following the blood marks, he soon came upon him lying amongst some bushes. Again the noble beast attempted to rise, only to fall from sheer weakness, and a bullet through his heart gave him his quietus. Meanwhile the herd were tearing past my hiding-place, a hundred yards off, and fearing to lose my only chance I fired at haphazard into the thick of them, and was considerably astonished at seeing one drop. The antlers of a doe are hardly worth retaining, but in my vanity I insisted on bringing them to England, as treasured evidence of my prowess on the first, and certainly the last, moufflon I am ever likely to meet.



MOUFFLON.



IBEX.

CHAPTER XII

A VERMIN DISTRICT

“DON’T enter a Caravansara till you pass Mianeh,” and “Keep an eye on your baggage till you’re clear of the town” was the final advice of an Englishman who came to see us start at 7 A.M. on November 18th. Both items were worthy of our serious attention, for Tabriz admittedly is the most dishonest community in Northern Persia. It appears that not many months previously a traveller, after seeing his luggage secured behind the cart, was surprised at the first halt to discover he had been relieved of everything. Passing as does the main road to Teheran through the centre of the bazaar, it is not unusual for a sharp knife to be deftly laid across the ropes, with the result that before many yards the entire cargo is on the ground. Even though we

kept our eyes carefully on our belongings it was marvellous that no accident occurred. Conceive a passage not twelve feet wide, thronged with a surging mass of men, donkeys and camels, and a carriage and four (abreast) dashing through as fast as the animals could put feet to the ground; stately old Persians sitting cross-legged on their wares with no time to escape on their legs, rolled complacently inwards off their bundles, whilst our new Jehu—Meshadi-abbas—(a terrible mouthful on the pinnacle of a precipice) slashed right and left over the head and shoulders of anything and everything that impeded our progress. "It's the only way," I was assured, "to effect a passage; gesticulating would be lost in the roar of gesticulation that ascended from every side." At length we were clear of the town, and with a fortnight's journey before us, had time to ruminate on our second warning.

From Seidabad (our first halt) through Hadji Aga and Tarkmenshai to Mianeh, the entire district is infested with every kind of vermin. The dust in the roads was alive with animal matter, a handful of dust vibrated like a lump of old stilton, and the Caravansara, in addition to the species that will suggest themselves to

everyone, were infested with rats as large as guinea-pigs. The reason is not far to seek, for it is to be remembered that in these desolate regions everything living seeks the same shelter as night comes on. Flocks of a thousand cattle and sheep, droves of mules and asses, caravans of camels, and their respective drivers,—all make for the Caravansara, where partitions hardly worthy the name, often without doors, are the only separation between everything living within the loathsome walls—a species of Noah's ark, without Noah's apparent Quartermaster-General abilities. Cleanliness under such conditions is hardly to be expected. With one houseful vacating at daylight premises that are to be occupied by a similar unsavoury contingent at sunset, one can scarcely be surprised that smallpox stalks unmolested around one, typhoid lurks in the hot-water urn, and all the plagues of Egypt are concentrated within the area of a few cubic feet. By the courtesy of the manager of the Indo-European telegraph at Tabriz, we were assured of a clean room at Mianeh, but alas! we were three days' distant, night was closing in, our two dips were spluttering on the floor, and we had neither camp bedstead nor mattress. We were

literally afraid to sit on the window-sill, so as it was a balmy, moonlight night we elected to open the window and sit in our cart, which, from its position outside, commanded a view of the room. Having pledged each other not to attempt to close our eyes, I lit my pipe, and within an hour we were both sound asleep. The recording angel will surely pardon this lapse from truth, when it is remembered that for six hours we had traversed the bed of a dry river, and jolted over boulders exceptionally round and large. Long before five, however, we were astir; and shouting for the inevitable hot water, waited for daylight with the patience of Saint Paul. Continuing our journey over tracts it would be monotonous to describe, we reached Hadji-Aga towards sunset. Along the route a new terror was constantly before us, and every half mile a dozen lepers would rush to our carriage side, and almost touching us with their dreadful hands, shriek for alms. Everywhere throughout Persia these afflicted creatures are thrust out of the community, to wander whithersoever they will, or to exist in the mud-huts that are specially erected for their accommodation in the neighbourhood of the highways.

In addition to these drawbacks, the district we

were passing through was fanatical to an extreme: at Hadji-Aga it was with difficulty we could procure water, and although they did not hesitate to take our money, they refused us a mattress. We were referred to as "Christian dogs," and one wretch to whom I called and pointed to my water bottle, spat on the ground and passed on. So hostile indeed was the general bearing that our driver—a Mohammedan, but not averse to a drink—said "let us get away," and paying our usual eighteenpence we "got away," amidst the jeers of the mob. At Tarkmenshai, where we rested our horses, I was witness to the observance of a cruel custom, that nearly brought us into trouble. Watching a caravan of asses being loaded prior to a start, I was shocked to observe the method of securing the loads to their backs. Fastening a strong rope to one pannier it was passed under the belly, then brought over the back, and passing round the neck, was securely fastened to its original starting-place. The cruelty of the arrangement may be realised when it is remembered that every motion tightened the cord at one or other extremity. Watching a hulking driver with his foot against the patient beast's side in the act of tightening the cordage, I walked up to him,

and swinging him round by the neck, proceeded to ease the torture. Rushing into the Caravansara, he returned with an excited mob, and it seemed as if a duel was imminent between the champions of the Crescent and the Cross. Standing in my original position I produced my revolver, and, without appearing to notice them, fired at an unoffending crow that was peacefully "browsing" in the road. I missed him certainly, but the dust that was raised in his immediate vicinity had the desired effect, and amidst a babel of guttural anathemas, the caravan proceeded on its way. There is no prevention apparently of the shocking cruelty that everywhere confronts one on these outlying roads. I have seen donkeys so heavily loaded as to drop at every step, only to be lifted up, and unmercifully beaten till they fell again; mules and horses literally on three legs, or with huge sores in the most sensitive parts, yet loaded to excess and driven till they dropped, to become a prey to the vultures and pariahs.

Along the road we passed numerous corpses of camels and horses, and on one occasion at a sharp turn I had the satisfaction of killing a splendid vulture at sixty paces. In anticipation of having it eventually stuffed, I devoted an hour to remov-

ing its skin, but the impossibility of procuring either alum or wood ashes, resulted in my being obliged to part company with his pungent remains.

On the third day we reached Mianeh, and driving to the Indo-European telegraph station, were received with every kindness; and oh, the luxury of a bath, and sleeping on a clean floor in a white-washed room! It was here I first realised I had succumbed to the native malaria that Europeans are always liable to in Persia. For days I had suffered from loss of appetite; even smoking had lost its charm, and in the morning my throat was sore and inflamed.

Mianeh is a fairly large town, but the governor, who is an uncle of the Shah's, assured me that neither here nor elsewhere till I reached Teheran should I find a doctor. I therefore sent a request to the governor's physician to visit me. Entering an hour later, my guest proceeded to squat on the floor, and asking for a cigar invited me (through my interpreter) to tell him all about it, promising to forward the needful. I handed him twelve krans (4s. 6d.) and in due course my physick arrived. In a soda-water bottle was a liquid with no label, whilst wrapt in a dirty paper were eight small packets. A verbal message intimated that

one was a gargle, the other to be taken frequently, but the messenger being unable to say which was which, I decided to be on the right side and use them alternately in their dual capacities. As I am writing this two months after the experiment, I feel that my course was a judicious one.

Djemalabad, which bears a very bad reputation, was our next destination. The village as it then stood had not been more than three years in existence, having been burnt to the ground by order of the Government for the wanton murder of three travellers who had partaken of their (in)hospitality. Approaching the place we were met by what proved to be two factions, each of which demanded in peremptory terms our patronage for the night. So vehement indeed became their respective recriminations, that deeming it advisable to decide promptly, I directed my interpreter to accompany the driver and select the best. Left alone amid these semi-barbarians, it was with difficulty that I could keep them from laying hands on our things, and nothing but standing up in the cart and showing my revolver kept them within reasonable bounds. There was, I am convinced, no actual danger, but with darkness setting in amid very weird surroundings, a

distance of a few paces between one's revolver and one's audience is desirable. The room we eventually found ourselves in astonished me by its cleanliness. Around the walls were French and Russian prints, whilst on the mantelpiece was an array of empty beer bottles and blacking jars that would have shamed the china shepherds and dogs of a sea-side lodging-house. Opening the back door I was staggered to find the outer wall rested on the very edge of a precipice many hundred feet deep; high trees at the foot looked like shrubs, and the moon that had now risen gave a weird and magnificent effect to the surrounding scene. "And this is the village they murder people in," I said to my companion as I munched my biscuit and sardine, "and chuck over there," I continued with a gulp of tea. "No sleep to-night, mind, and light every dip, regardless of cost." Bolting our front door as securely as possible, it was satisfactory to know that nothing but a cat could have found foothold in our rear, so with a volume of light that would have done credit to the "South Eastern" we chatted, and smoked, and barely slept at all. At intervals during the night, hideous sounds as of someone trying to weep were wafted into our

ears, which in the morning we ascertained was a kind of Persian "Wake." A son of our host, it appeared, had just returned home after a year's absence, and was trying to convey his sorrow for the loss of a brother who had died six months previously. But with daylight, how indescribably magnificent was the prospect from our humble back door! "Would that I owned such premises on the sea front at Brighton" I thought. "I could let them to a Hebrew capitalist or an American parvenu at £50 a week." As our journey was, by the exigencies of the road, to be a short one, we delayed our stay till close upon ten so as to reach Zendjan early in the afternoon, and put in as much rest as was possible before the dreaded Kaflan-Kuh made its proximity felt by a series of the most impossible approaches, and which, judging by the bated-breath with which Meshadi-Abbas referred to it, would tax all the energy of man and beast on the morrow.

CHAPTER XIII

THE KAFLAN KUH

LEAVING Djemalabad about 10 A.M., we reached Zendjan shortly after two, and desiring to see the sights of the place we wandered from our hovel after carefully locking our port-manteaux and leaving Meshadi-Abbas on sentry. We had not proceeded far before we were accosted by a loafer, who was good enough to inform us that he had been a year in Batoum in good employment, but feeling "home sick" had taken a run over to see his kinsfolk. As we awaited the inevitable sequel without comment, he continued that he would be glad of some light job if his Excellency would put him in its way, or, as an alternative would be grateful if the wherewithal could be found to enable him to return to Batoum. (His Excellency, it may be added, did not respond as desired.)

Meanwhile we had reached the outskirts of the village, and watched at a distance a party of maidens busy in the erection of a hut. Desiring to obtain a better view of the filthy process—which consisted of some half dozen girls dipping their hands into a pile of camel-dung slosh and hurling it at the wall—we approached a little nearer, when, wrapping their shawls over their faces, and screaming at the top of their voices, they ran pell mell in the direction of the village. Awaiting the *dénouement*, we were alarmed to discover an old haradan leading a mob of some fifty half-clad natives, gesticulating wildly and pointing in our direction; she was evidently describing how the Christian dogs had outraged the privacy of a daughter of the faithful, and calling for dire vengeance on our heads. Propitiating the Batoum loafer—who had learned European customs in the matter of tips—he replied loudly that the Sahib had done nothing wrong; but despite the denial the mob maintained a hostile attitude, and a few of the bolder began picking up stones. Thinking the time had come for a counter demonstration, I directed my two companions to follow me, and taking up our position with our backs to the hut, with the camel filth as an “out work” in our

immediate front, I produced my trusty "colt" and requested the loafer to intimate to all whom it might concern that the first stone would be my cue for firing into the crowd. All this while I exhibited the little weapon ostentatiously, and as was to be expected of a Persian crowd, it gradually melted. But we had by no means completed our adventures in this hateful village. Making an early start next morning, Meshadi-Abbas discovered that one of his horse rugs had been stolen, and calling upon me not to pay our reckoning (1s. 6d.) till his property had been restored, proceeded to take the law into his own hands by slashing indiscriminately everyone who came within reach. Again a hostile mob assembled, again stones were picked up and my pocket companion came into view, and again we drove off amidst the yells of the inhabitants but minus the rug.

The Kaflan Kuh now began to make its proximity felt, as for miles we proceeded in a bitter wind, along what appeared to be the bed of a dried-up river. In our front the rugged range of mountains towered over us, disclosing what resembled the entrance of a railway tunnel, but which turned out to be the only entrance to this otherwise

impassible defile. After two weary hours we at length entered the ravine and then followed a series of surprises not often to be met with in mountain journeys. Descending from our cart we first found ourselves between overhanging rocks, so dark that except at mid-day no sun could possibly penetrate ; proceeding up a steep incline we were confronted at the summit with paths so narrow and so slippery that traversing them was a work of considerable danger. Plodding wearily along, with a wind fairly cutting us in half, we felt disposed to disencumber ourselves of overcoats, but halting and recovering our breath we plodded on again till we found ourselves amid the snow-capped summits of a dozen mountains and thus for eight weary hours, at one time on the ridge of a precipice resembling a razor, at another floundering amidst boulders the size of Stonehenge, we staggered along. Meanwhile the cart, considerably in our rear, came up to us, and we discovered what a hash our belongings had been blended into ; rugs, bottles, cushions, goloshes formed one confused mass to be put in order and laughed at—for had we not escaped the snow by the skin of our teeth? And what would have been our sensations on arriving half way, to have found further progress

impossible? After this, our road was mere child's play, a few hostile villages and vermin *ad libitum*: but had we not gone through it all before, and the dreaded Kaflan Kuh to westward of us? Surely now, if ever, was the time for rejoicing, and whilst our jaded horses fed, a tin of sheep's tongue was discussed and whisky dispensed freely to Meshadi-Abbas—good Mohammedan that he was,—my Persian—a Nestorian—and my semi-collapsed self. Kasvin was our next important halt, and here the exhausted state of our horses after twelve days' incessant toil necessitated a stay of thirty-six hours.

Kasvin, from a traveller's point of view, is a town of considerable importance. Half way between Teheran and the Caspian Sea, it is on the high road to Europe; it boasts moreover a large hotel, and is the head-quarters of the Russian Company that holds the contract for conveying the mails and supplying the various post carts and post horses that run between Teheran and Enzeli. After the barbarism we had experienced, it might almost be described as civilised, possessing all the drawbacks and few of the advantages of Western Europe. The Company, which is run on strict monopoly lines, permits no traveller to stay, and no horse to feed at their various intermediate

stations unless travelling under their special auspices ; and despite the fact that they have no connection between Tabriz and Teheran, it was with the greatest difficulty we were permitted foothold, although arriving hungry and cold, late in the evening. The hotel, which has no upstairs, and is colossal in area, is simply a caravansara, consisting of a stone passage with bedrooms leading therefrom ; they contain beds, however, though no bedding, and as such are worthy of admiration. Food of the worst sort has to be eaten in one's apartment, and anything beyond tea and native bread involves the wait of an hour. Everything, moreover, is impregnated with the same diabolical odour, as if it had been cooked in the giraffe house, and makes one long for a dietary of fruit and eggs. The prices are exorbitant, and a trestle bed, a wood fire, and boiling water, may be set down at half a sovereign. Between Kasvin and Teheran the road is good, and may safely be undertaken in sixteen hours ; beyond Kasvin, however, towards the sea coast the road develops into a fine Persian specimen, and whilst as far as Patchina it is tolerable, beyond that to Resht, Pirkazar, and Enzeli all the dynamics at one's control are required to keep man and mule perpendicular. In many

places it is so narrow that two mules cannot walk abreast, and the boulders, precipices, and four foot drops leave nothing to be desired. Lord Curzon, whose experience of roads in all parts of the world has been pretty considerable, describes the "Kotals" (mountain passes) that he encountered in Persia as the most formidable he had ever met with. As the description of Donannes, on the borders of a lagoon, whence one is conveyed to the steamer for Baku, applies rather to the return journey, I will defer my experiences there for a later chapter. The hotel at Kasvin is very ambitious in its aspirations, and a visitors' book, with a column for remarks, showed that whilst some travellers were charitable to a fault, others expressed their views in cynical and droll terms. Speaking of a death-trap that existed in a corridor, our wag remarked: "The sanitation is perfect, and would do credit to any hotel in London or Paris;" others confined their remarks to name and date, and refrained from admiration where typhoid was apparent everywhere.

And the marvel is that the death-rate amongst Europeans is not greater than it is. With a rainfall abnormally low, during the past year falling two-fifths below the usual measurement; with

diseased dogs drinking from the street rivulets, where women wash clothes, and the drinking water is spooned out for the residents; with an open drain before every house, and cesspools in every compound; with dirt indescribable mingled with everything one eats, is it a wonder that no European escapes typhoid in a greater or lesser degree? Against all this is nature's bountiful resistance, for, go where you will, no more healthy, glorious climate exists in the world than is to be found in Persia.

Despite the extremes of temperature, which in summer is 115 degrees in the shade, and in winter 29 degrees of frost, the air is so pure and rarified that insulators might be dispensed with on the telegraph poles, and football players who in England dispute the goals for forty-five minutes at a stretch, are compelled to curtail the period about half. In summer the air is so charged with electricity that sparks are emitted when applying the hair brush, and I was told an instance (though I cannot vouch for it) of an old gentleman with a head as bald as a skating rink who was frightened out of his life by the emission of sparks on applying a rough towel to his pate, as had been his daily custom in merry England.

Demavend, a mountain with an altitude of 19,000 feet, within forty miles of Teheran, can, in this marvellously pure atmosphere, be seen distinctly two hundred miles off with the naked eye. But nature seemed to be aware that the recipients of her marvellous bounty were unworthy of the boons she was so plenteously bestowing, and that the rains which in other countries would have been carefully garnered, would here for the want of ordinary appliances, run to waste; so the mountains that surround Teheran were brought into requisition, and the heavy snows by which they are capped the year round, throughout the entire summer afford a continuous supply to meet the wants of this most improvident race.

Leaving Kasvin on the morning of the second day, we remained for the night at Shahabad. Here the hotel, we were informed, is run by the Prime Minister, but despite the advantage of being catered for by a Cabinet Minister, there is little to commend the "Salisbury Arms."

At daylight we were disturbed by the usual bellowing to Ali, although by this time we were pretty well accustomed to it, but the holy man who bellowed on this occasion was if anything shriller than usual, and altogether the most un-

desirable "tenore robusto" I had yet encountered. "Mark my word," I said to my Persian, "the brute is a hypocrite; such lungs could never belong to a saint." Standing on the verandah an hour later, my prognostications were more than verified. Again I recognised the infernal voice, this time raised, not in supplication and prayer, but alas, in lamentation and woe; and looking towards the road I saw the Mullah, struggling, kicking, bellowing, in the hands of a dozen servants. The devout man, it appears, was "doing a guy" which to the uninitiated may be explained as having elected not to pay. The staff he held in his hand he was permitted to retain, but his flowing robe was ruthlessly torn off his shoulders and carried triumphantly into the Caravansara.

At 11 A.M. next morning we entered Teheran, and our troubles were ended for a short season.

CHAPTER XIV

TEHERAN

A STRANGER entering Teheran for the first time cannot fail to be impressed by the indescribable air of Oriental repose that appears to pervade everything. Proceeding gradually through ultra-Asiatic streets with hovels on either side and beggars at every door, the road widens till one approaches the confines of the Place d'Armes. This immense square is flanked on one side by the Bank of Persia, the post-office, and military store-houses, whilst on the other side is an imposing park of artillery where every variety of obsolete gun is displayed. These implements of destruction are fired on every conceivable excuse, and rammed with as much powder as can safely be indulged in. The great Mohammedan fast of "Ramazan" being now in full blast, a splendid

opportunity was afforded for the national indulgence in noise, and four guns—one would have been ample—boomed forth every morning at five, warning the faithful that muzzles must be adjusted, till four more guns at 5 P.M. gave the signal for abandonment to Pillaus and Kabobs and all the delicacies of an Asiatic menu. A great difficulty in Teheran is to find a particular house whose geography is unknown to one. Streets have no names, and every road consists of buildings the exact counterparts of their neighbours; for no matter how grand the house within or the grounds that surround it, it offers nothing to the view but an unpretentious door, with a hasp for a padlock, and usually an open drain across the entrance.

Legation Street—in the absence of any other name—is undoubtedly the St James' of Teheran. Leaving the Place d'Armes by the western gate, one is confronted with grimy hovels sandwiched between palatial modern buildings, which as one advances disclose the Hôtel d'Europe—into which I never ventured—the Teheran Restaurant, and then the English Hotel. This comfortable little hostelry—whence these lines are being written—is entered by the usual unpretentious doorway leading into a fairly-sized quadrangle

with verandah, on to which the various apartments look. The worthy little English lady who presides over its destinies is entitled to every credit for the excellent accommodation she provides at most reasonable prices. Early tea, consisting of eggs or porridge, is brought to one's room about eight; a breakfast of three courses—the meal of the day—is served in the dining-room at twelve; with afternoon tea at four, and a capital dinner at eight,—can all be indulged in for about three shillings a day. The rooms come to another three shillings, and, with the extras of coal and candle, may be calculated as well within seven shillings a day. Coal is an expensive luxury, and of so bad a quality, that a speculative gas company not long ago had to strike work, through their inability to provide light that merely suffocated without illuminating their subscribers. Another peculiarity it possesses is that, if not almost immediately consumed, it dissolves into dust; and an European of an economic turn of mind informed me that on his first arrival in Teheran, having laid in a considerable stock during the dog days, he was astonished to find, when he next inspected it, that the coal had entirely disappeared, and a

mountain of dust had taken its place. It is stated that Teheran is now ambitious for electric lighting, and any firm of an enterprising turn has an opportunity of earning gratitude, if not affluence, by taking up the tender that is in the market.

Continuing our way along Legation Street, we arrive at the Belgian, German, Turkish, and British Legations, and it is pleasant to record that the latter is by far the most imposing and extensive in Teheran. Under the direction of an able diplomatist of modern ideas, assisted by a gracious consort, British hospitality is by no means stinted, and, although the national mourning made entertainments on an elaborate scale impossible at the time I was there, no Britisher can enter Teheran without receiving prompt and kindly hospitality. Leaving the Place d'Armes in the opposite direction, one finds oneself in the Downing Street of Persia; a mob of ragged soldiery sitting on a door-step, proclaim that one is contemplating the Foreign Office, whilst yet, a few yards further, the palace of the Shah bursts on one's astonished view. Approaching it in that spirit of veneration possessed by every true Briton and brother-snob when permitted to gaze on Royalty, it was with

difficulty one strangled the heinous wonder whether one was looking upon the Summer Palace of Peking (by daylight at Earl's Court), or again, as in the days of one's youth, revelling amidst the pavilions of Cremorne. Wandering yet further, one finds oneself outside a grim portal, heavily grated, which leads to his Majesty's harem. On the road lounge grotesque soldiery in red frock coats, knee breeches, and cocked hats, whilst "the band"—happily resting at the time of my passing—were busily preparing to bray forth sweet music at intervals to the favoured favourites of Mouzaffar-ed-Din. I had already had experience of one of their bands. Not long after my arrival the double wedding of the Grand Vizier's two sons took place, and bands paraded the streets for days in honour of the event. As the fifty musicians, with a considerable preponderance of brass and drum, marched past, the tune played seeming familiar to me, though I cannot better describe it than as "St Patrick's Day" grafted on to Mendelssohn's "Wedding March"; but what impressed me most were the antics of the executants when they came to certain bars. Turning towards each other, everyone who had not a reed instrument down his throat, became convulsed

with laughter, and the hysteria continued whilst the clarionettes emitted a kind of gurgle till the melody required their services. I failed to ascertain what it all meant, but that some subtle joke lurked beneath it capable of tickling a Persian palate was evident. Great credit is, however, due to the distinguished French band-master for the degree of perfection to which he has brought the Shah's bands; but to insure soft sounds emanating from an instrument capable of deafening volume—when in the hands of a Persian—is a task beyond human power.

The Shah is an enthusiast on the subject of motors, and all his excursions are made in one. On his first appearance after his last trip to Europe, the innovation was looked upon by the faithful with suspicion; and heads were shaken, and it was remarked that Mouzaffar-ed-din was becoming Christianised. But his Majesty in this respect was grossly libelled. A sportsman in the truest acceptation, his inclinations run towards all new things; the latest motors, the latest breech-loaders, and an occasional trip to keep up with the times, and his subjects incur no risk of violent hands being laid on their lives or their property.

Despot in virtue of his birthright, he never

exercises his despotism ; punishments—certainly the death penalty—are practically unknown, and he errs on the side of leniency where a firmer hand might attain objects that are found wanting under his gentle sway, yet the Persians cling to the memory of the late Shah. Nasr-i-din shah Ghadyar was a despot in the truest meaning of the term ; if he wanted money he took it from his subjects, and if they resented the honourable distinction he took their lives,—and yet his memory is held in reverence by every Persian, for he ruled his country with a rod of iron, and the universal verdict is “*mashallah*, he was a man.”

Let us hope that the Shah’s visit to England may convince him that advice may be sincere, and at the same time disinterested, and that a new direction may be given to his future domestic policy.

Perhaps the most enlightened Persian in the Shah’s dominions is Mirza Aboul Nasarel Moulk, G.C.M.G., but unfortunately his English predilections do not make him a “*persona grata*” in Teheran. A graduate of Oxford University and a perfect English and French scholar, this distinguished diplomatist is practically banished to Kurdistan as governor, at—as is well known

—the instigation of Russia. At the Jubilee of the late Queen it was Mirza Moulk who represented the Persian monarch, and again on the accession of the present Shah he proceeded to England to announce the fact. Nearly every minister in Persia is impregnated with Anglo-phobia. The present Grand Vizier—the Atabak Azam—who in the late Shah's time was English to the backbone, is now Russian to his boots. Emin-el-dowleh, the minister for Foreign Affairs—and second only in power to the Atabak-Azam—after wobbling for years between England and Russia, has now thrown in his lot, body and soul, with Russia,—his son having been appointed Minister at St Petersburg at a critical moment, by Russia's special request.

The Shah's brother, whose leanings towards England are proverbial, has been practically exiled by being appointed Governor of distant Isfahan, and so through the entire gamut, from Grand Vizier to pimp, Russian influence predominates, Russian officials direct, and Russian money (when France is malleable) smoothes the way for that great problem that will some day have to be solved, that rude awakening that cannot be eternally postponed.

People may ask: How was this to be avoided? The answer is simple,—“More common sense, less misplaced caution, and a firmer attitude in the future.” Twenty years ago, British influence was paramount; a few years later the then Grand Vizier—since dead—literally asked the British Minister for a C.M.G. in return for granting a concession relating to a textile monopoly which would considerably have advanced British commercial interests. The bauble, however, was refused, and the concession was never granted. Again, a few years later the Loan fiasco (chapter xviii.) gave Russia her opportunity, since when matters have gone from bad to worse, till the diplomatic thermometer of to-day remains steadily at zero, as the position of British prestige.

Another official who has served England loyally in Teheran for thirty years, in the anomalous position of being employed by both Governments in matters of the highest and most confidential kind, was only last year awarded with a C.S.I.—a decoration usually bestowed on a Moonshee—and this in a country Asiatic to the backbone, where an inch of tinsel well displayed has a higher significance than a yard of bullion concealed up the sleeve. Titles are somewhat erratic.

cally bestowed in Persia, and it is no uncommon thing for a peace-loving citizen to be created a general. It was a positive relief to me after my audience with the Shah to find I had not been made a bishop.

It was in anticipation of these possible visits of ceremony that the wonderful frock coat was designed and constructed in Tiflis, but its possession, alas! by no means removed the difficulties I innocently hoped had been overcome. A silk hat, it appeared, was absolutely indispensable, but my hat and hat-box had long since succumbed to the turnpike roads of Zendjan; to scour the Bazaar in hopes of finding a "fitting" Lincoln and Bennett was labour lost in vain, so the brilliant idea occurred to me that if carried jauntily in the hand its smallness would pass unnoticed. Here again my anticipations were doomed to disappointment, for Persian etiquette demands that the hat shall be worn. Abandoning all hopes of satisfactorily solving all these hopeless problems, an inspiration came to me: "Englishmen of a certain age"—I would, if necessary, explain—"always wear slouch hats," and I decided to appear in one of Heath's latest triumphs. My appearance was a profound success; the Tiflis

garment, despite its immersion, answered nobly to the call, and frock coats and pot hats may confidently be expected to be *en rigueur* next season in Teheran.

The European New Year, as distinguished from the Mohammedan anniversary, is the festive season in Teheran. Tall hats of every fashion and of every country, that have peaceably reposed during the preceding eleven months, are brought out to be furbished and jauntily worn ; everybody calls on everybody else, and plans for the coming season are carefully laid out.

An extraordinary custom is that the new arrival should first call upon the resident, and an ignorance of this unusual rule often gives offence where not intended, and deprives one of acquaintances one would otherwise gladly have made.

In addition to all this, Teheran, like all other small societies, is divided into a series of cliques, and the four hundred souls which constitute its European population are separately enlisted under their distinctive leaders, and indulge in either the extremest admiration or extremest disparagement of their own or other circles. The Indo-European Telegraph Company are the acknowledged leaders of one of these fashionable sets, whilst the followers

of the Bank of Persia yield to no one in their claim as leaders of society. Distinct from these rival factions is the "Legation Set," who, whilst exclusively confining their invitations amongst themselves, occasionally distribute crumbs of patronage which are gratefully accepted.

This festive season extends till Lent, when balls take place nightly ; money on these occasions is lavishly expended, and the cotillion, for which the performers are selected weeks in advance with as much care as is devoted to a Royal quadrille at Buckingham Palace, is a leading feature and vigorously indulged in to the dulcet strains of a Persian military band. At a grand ball given by His Highness the Grand Vizier, as much as £40 was expended in flowers for this presumably ravishing enjoyment, from all which it will be seen that the New Year gaieties of Teheran are literally bewildering.

In contradistinction to these Christian festivities is the Mohammedan New Year, which, beginning on the 21st of March, extends without intermission to the 4th of April. During this "close time" every shop is closed, business is paralysed, and it is a matter of congratulation if one can even procure a stamp at the Post-Office for the weekly

mail. The Mohammedan population, indeed, if not drunk are evidently under the influence of some beverage not prohibited by the Koran. One of the most interesting ceremonies is the sacrifice in the public square of the camel annually offered up by the Shah. Accompanied by all the barbaric splendour that so fervent a ceremony demands, the doomed beast is led into a surging mass of fanatics, and long before its life blood has yielded to the knife of the officiating Mullah, the flesh is literally torn from its limbs by the howling crowd, anxious to possess the most infinitesimal portion of a certain pass to Paradise. Sandwiched between these two festivals is the Armenian Christmas, but happily its only drawback is the impossibility of getting one's clothes washed, as "Dhobees" to a man are Armenians.

The title of Khan (or Count) is conferred broadcast—any ragamuffin who has done some dirty work for the Shah, anyone willing to plank £10 on the right spot, blossoms into a Khan; respectable tradesmen, enlightened diplomats, disreputable nobodies—all are Khans; it's the Alpha and Omega of the Persian de Brett, within the reach of anyone coveting a decoration.

Persians are splendid horsemen, and the cattle one sees in Teheran would not disgrace the Row : half Arab and half Turkistan, these beautiful animals possess enormous strength, and can be relied upon to do their fifty and sixty miles a day. In the remoter districts, incredible as it may seem, they are regularly fed on a mash largely composed of the tails of the flat-tailed sheep.

The victorias for hire are for the most part good, at the not exorbitant charge of 1s. 6d. per hour. It has been my misfortune to be in two mishaps during my stay in Teheran, for whilst the stallions are in many instances spirited and mettlesome, the drivers would certainly not be able to obtain a license in the Metropolitan District. My first experience was whilst being driven leisurely down Legation Street, when the driver for no apparent reason thought fit to descend, the horses for the same cause thought fit to bolt, and at breakneck speed we dashed towards the Place d'Armes. Standing on the front seat, I succeeded in reaching one rein, and guiding the near horse with my stick we arrived safely at their usual stand. "Mashallah, but he's a man," were the comments of the crowd that followed me, and I retreated

into a neighbouring shop to conceal my blushes and my be-mudded clothes. Shortly afterwards I was gratified by seeing the driver arrive with a battered nose. My next experience, if not so dangerous, involved more physical labour. Starting at a gentle trot it was not long before our off wheel got imbedded in the mud wall of an enclosure ; proceeding again we got into a ditch, and yet again into another ditch, on both of which occasions I had to get out and shove. They were the only two ditches on the road, and my Jehu managed to steer into both.

The drives beyond the city gates are exceptionally beautiful, and one can realise what they must be when surrounded by a wealth of summer verdure. But the contemplation of the immense tracts of rich soil absolutely uncultivated, forces upon one's notice the pitiable state of a country endowed with every blessing of nature, yet incapable of applying the most ordinary means of utilising it. Irrigation could remedy all this, for within forty miles an inexhaustible supply of water has only to be directed from the surrounding mountains to produce abundant crops ; but the exchequer is empty, the monies anxiously awaited from the hoped-for Russian Loan that ought to be

devoted to the amelioration of the starving peasantry, are required for arrears due to every department of the State, for the Shah's European tour, and the thousand and one frivolities that constitute Government in Persia. And so the nation is drifting into hopeless revolution, and the murmurings of an indignant people are even now heard, that their country has been sold to a foreign power, and that the remedy for its redemption rests in their hands. But a gigantic scheme for the irrigation and water supply of Teheran has since then come to my notice, and I cannot do better than produce it in its entirety in chapter xv., venturing only to add that water, it must be remembered, is literally more valuable than gold and that though the original outlay may appear hazardous, the profits would be colossal.

The Zoological Gardens which are situated about three miles beyond the gates are well worth a visit, if only to compare their neglected condition with the perfect organisation of our own. Although intended to show the various species of fowl and beast to be found in the Kingdom, the entire collection consists of seven bears, six leopards—including two cheetahs—one

lion, a wolf, a hyena, and a white baboon of a species I do not think is represented in our Zoological. The bears are simply chained to trees, and exposed day and night to summer and winter weather. The cages of all the other animals were terribly dark and dirty, and showed every indication of the entire absence of sanitation. The gardens are exceptionally beautiful, and their sweeping avenues and fountains, although neglected, suggest their having been laid out after the plan of Versailles. The ceiling in the Shah's pavilion, which alone is worth a visit, is one mass of mirrors, bevelled to resemble the facia of a diamond, and might almost have suggested the scene of "The Hall with the thousand mirrors" that was produced some years ago in a Drury Lane Pantomime.

Postal and telegraph vagaries are a terrible trial in Persia. The Post-Office although ostensibly open daily—at various hours—only receives letters for certain destinations on certain days, and the unwary traveller posting for London on the day devoted to the Indian mail, may rest assured his letter will travel to Calcutta before (if ever) it reaches its destination. Telegraphing again is fenced round with even more irritating

conditions. Situated under the same roof are the "Indo-European," "The Indian Government," and the "Persian State" lines. If, however, one wishes to telegraph, it is necessary that the message is written on a subscriber's "form"; non-subscribers are not otherwise permitted to wire, the alternative being to send it across the "Persian State" line, where after being censored, it may or may not reach its destination within a week. There seems no justification for this needless restriction, as happily every resident is a subscriber and the stranger has only to have it written on a friend's "form" to insure immediate despatch. Another annoyance to would-be transmitters of messages is that the line is monopolised two hours every afternoon by Russia, and worked direct from their Legation by Russian officials. Every telegram from Persia is read at Odessa and every letter is liable to be opened at Tiflis or Baku by officials specially entrusted with this duty; if the contents appear suspicious they are either copied or forwarded bodily to St Petersburg, when they are either destroyed or forwarded a week later.

There are some excellent shops, owned respectively by French and Dutch traders; and,

incredible to relate, Worth of Paris has a branch and finds very lucrative customers amongst the higher - class Persian women. The "creations," however, are never seen by vulgar eyes, and the same black flowing robe and white "Roo-band" are the universal costume for high and low beyond the sacred precincts of the harem.

When all is said and done Teheran is a delightful place, with a climate almost unrivalled ; and, were it not for the Russian prohibition regarding railways and the thousand disabilities imposed upon the Shah, might develop into one of the most prosperous cities in Asia, within seven days' journey of London.

During my stay in Teheran I came across some interesting characters. K—— (now K—— Khan) is about forty years of age, and for the past twelve years has been in honourable employment under the Persian Government ; a Turk by nationality, he was formerly the terror of the Caucasus between Iravan and Nakchvan as the most desperate bandit of modern times. He admits to having killed and robbed some hundred travellers during his career, till, finding that things were getting too hot, and being hunted persistently by Russian and Turkish patrols, he intercepted the late Shah on

his last return journey from Europe and promised amendment, sacrificing bullocks in support of his protestations, whereupon he was taken under the Shah's protection, and became one of his household. The extraordinary experiences this apparently inoffensive man narrated to me—how he escaped capture by disguise, or cut his way through *cordons* of Cossacks, although incredible are hardly worth repetition, resembling as they do the escapades of Jack Sheppard and the countless stories in the penny-dreadful style. But sitting complacently smoking a cigar, it was difficult to realise that the inoffensive Khan before me was the resolute ruffian of twelve years ago, who would ruthlessly have slit a man's gullet for the prospect of earning a few roubles. Listening to his experiences, various "tight" corners between Iravan and Tabriz rose visibly before me, where the traveller would be helpless against any organised attack.

Travelling in Persia may now be indulged in in absolute safety, and with the exception perhaps of the district bordering on Kurdistan, may safely be undertaken without escort. A girl on a pony with a gold chain on her neck and a hundred pounds in her pocket would be infinitely safer through the

length and breadth of Persia, than in the Ratcliff highway or in any part of the Caucasus.

The Persian indeed must be exceptionally good by nature, for though restrained by neither law, police, nor government, little or no crime exists, and life and property are safe, with the exception of petty larcenies by occasional night prowlers. Personally, I felt infinitely more uncomfortable whilst traversing Holy Russia from Kamali to Nakchvan, than in the most desolate portions of the Shah's dominions.

Another interesting acquaintance was a Norwegian newspaper correspondent, who was passing through Teheran on his way to India. With the same disregard for danger that actuates our English war correspondents, this most reticent of men after considerable persuasion gave me some of his unique experiences.

"It was in 1895," to use his own words, "that I was in the neighbourhood of Damascus at the time of the Druz insurrection, when I was arrested as a Russian spy. Handcuffed to a soldier's stirrup leather, I was beaten with the back of a sword as I was made to accompany them through the streets, called a Christian dog, and every minute expected my brains to be blown out.

Arriving before the governor, and demanding that he should telegraph to the Swedish Minister at Constantinople, I was eventually released and conducted over the frontier. I never got any redress. Again, in 1896 I was in Aleppo, during the Armenian massacres, and leaving the town with my guide, was followed by brigands, who after calling on me to stop, fired and shot me through the arm.¹ I made my complaint at the next town but again got no redress. I had my revenge on the dirty Turks the following year, when disguised as a woman I went to Mekka. I will tell you how I came to think of it.

“I came to Constantinople after the Armenian murders of August 1897, and met there a man whose acquaintance I had formerly made in Tripolis. This man was Ali of Zanzibar, and earned his living as a slave dealer with Tippu Tip. When the English came to Zanzibar, the slave trade became unremunerative, and Ali came to Tripolis and Constantinople, where we met frequently in the Turkish cafés, and one day he asked me: ‘Whence do you go this year?’ ‘I go to Kreta (Crete) in November and will stay there till Christmas.’ ‘But,’ said Ali, ‘would you

¹ I saw the hole the bullet had made.

not like to go with me to Mekka?' I thought the man was joking, and replied, 'Yes, let us go to Mekka.' 'Well,' said Ali, 'if you meet me in Suez all will be well.'

"Shortly afterwards I went to Kreta and Suez, where also was Ali, who told me how he intended to do the job. 'You must,' said he, 'go as a woman, marry me, I shall give you a negress slave as servant; in that way we shall go to Mekka; it is not at all dangerous, and you must pay me 1000 francs.' We spoke for a long time, and then Ali agreed for 800 francs. We did not dare to dress or marry in Suez where I was known, so we went to Kairo, and in a small Grecian khan I was dressed by Ali and Hayshas the negress. They put several pillows and cushions under my clothes, like a woman, veiled me with a thick Turkish veil, and thus we went to the Mufti who wrote our names. I called myself Fatima. After the ceremony, the railway brought us to Suez and to the steamer for Djeddah; we booked third class, but there were several young Levantians who tried to start a flirtation, so I had to ask Ali to show himself very jealous, and he built for me a little tent on deck, telling the men I was Turkish and could not speak Arabic. After five days we

arrived in Djeddah and stayed two days in a 'khan,' and it was generally believed that Ali intended to sell me as a slave in Mekka. The third day we went with camels to Mekka, where I had a special room for Hayshas and myself. For two days we wandered over the town and passed the Court of the Great Mosque. It was not the pilgrims' season, and very few people were there, but still some went kissing the black stone ; Ali gave me some water of the Holy Source, and told me that all who drank of this water came to Paradise, even though unbelievers. One day the door guards glanced suspiciously at me, as I was very tall, and made very stout with pillows, but Hayshas showed them her black face and they got afraid. The second night I had a dispute with Ali, he wanted more money. I had no money, and told him I should not pay any more till we were back in Suez. 'Well,' said Ali, 'I go alone with Hayshas to Djeddah to-morrow, and you can stay alone in Mekka.' I said 'All right. I will still be able to put matters right.' He wanted to know what I intended, so I said to him, 'I go of course to the Pasha and tell him that I am an European stranger, and that he may do with me as he likes, but I'll also tell him to send soldiers

after the man who left on the 10th inst., for he is a traitor not only against me, but also against the Mohammedans, as he made up the whole thing, so you won't remain free.' Then Ali got afraid, and said he was joking, and did not want more money. After this we went away and arrived safely in Cairo. I was always dressed as a woman for three weeks, and have not taken the clothes off even by night, as I did not dare. I will advise nobody to go to Mekka, at least not as a woman."

I have taken down the above interesting experience verbatim, and if any one doubts it, he can verify the facts by writing to the *Stockholm Daily News* on whose staff is Captain Alexis Kaylensteernan of the Swedish army.

CHAPTER XV

TEHERAN (*continued*)

A TERRIBLE infliction during summer are the mosquitoes, while the sand-flies are even more troublesome ; the latter being so small as to be hardly visible and so light that the hand intent on their annihilation only wafts them out of reach.

English and lager beers are great luxuries and cost from one and sixpence to two shillings a bottle. The Russian beer, however, is comparatively cheap, but contains, as I was credibly informed by an eminent physician, a considerable quantity of salicylic acid. This pernicious ingredient whilst preserving the fluid, has a directly injurious effect upon the heart, and persons suffering from valvular or other disease of that organ would do well to avoid it as they would a rattle-

snake. Coffee and tea are the staple beverages, and in addition to their other uses are employed in the diffusion of etiquette amongst the higher classes. A visitor calling upon a high-class Persian is shortly after his entrance regaled with one or the other; when the conversation begins to lag a second cup is brought in, after which, if he does not take the hint and clear out it is impossible to say what the consequences might be. It may, however, be assumed that they would be serious.

In the bazaar and cafés interspersed through the town the inevitable "Chi" is the staple drink, and a swarming mass with "Kalian" in mouth and a tumbler of tea before them may be seen from morning to night discussing the burning questions of the moment with an accuracy as regards the past and the future that is almost incredible. Six months ago it was the talk of the Bazaar that troubles in Kurdistan might be expected before long, and within the last few days intelligence from St Petersburg corroborates this prediction. The cause and effect and the coincidence of these two distinct events must be left to conjecture. One thing, however, is certain that the Mohammedan loves his Bazaar with as much fervour as a Frenchman does the Boulevards, and that what-

ever rumour emanates from this source may be accepted as reliable.

The mendicant organisation of Teheran may be said to be a truly advanced one; the movements of any exalted personage are immediately known to them, a wedding or a christening or a funeral attracts them to the exact spot, and it is no uncommon sight to see the road on either side swarming two deep for half a mile by every class of beggar in hopes of participating in the "back-sheesh" that is invariably bestowed upon them. Every time the Grand Vizier leaves his residence he is preceded by two outriders (Ferashes) who scramble infinitesimal nickle coins, whilst His Highness is running the gauntlet of his mendicant admirers.

Typhoid is somewhat prevalent in Teheran, and is to be found lurking principally in the beef, the milk, and the water; but this is hardly to be wondered at, when it is remembered that the rivulets which run through every street are used by the dogs and the inhabitants for drinking, and by the Mohammedan women for the washing of clothes. Mohammed's axiom, as laid down in the Koran, viz., "That all flowing water capable of floating a pellet of sheep dung is necessarily

clean," must be held responsible for this terrible disregard of sanitation, and despite the assurance that all the water and milk one drinks in Teheran has been carefully boiled, I was always chary of indulging in either one or the other.

Five miles from Teheran is the village of Raj, and now the terminus of the Suburban Railway. It is the city of Rages spoken of in the Apocrypha (Tobit, chap. iv.), whose old walls, that had a circumference of twenty miles in the days of the prophet, may still be seen. It possesses also the unique distinction of having been the spot where the first bill transaction ever recorded took place, when Tobit sent a messenger from Nineveh for some money, and gave what in modern parlance would be called a "kite."

There is a fascination in contemplating the various associations connected with this spot. Tobit, as we read, resided here, and was led into captivity at Nineveh; Sennacherib, made famous by Byron, was associated with the place; Nebuchadnezzar, we are told, had dealings with it; and Tobit narrates how, before he died, he rejoiced upon hearing of the destruction of Nineveh. There can be little doubt that excavations in the neighbourhood, from whence the few specimens I

refer to were found, would bring to light relics of far greater antiquity than Nineveh, and amply repay the necessary outlay for a properly organised expedition. I cannot do better than refer my readers to the book of Tobit, which literally teems with references to this fascinating spot. It may not be known, however, to what a science the art of counterfeiting ancient relics has attained. In the British Museum may be seen large cases—displaying (apparently) genuine excavations from Egypt and the Holy Land—labelled in large characters “Modern imitations.” A high archæological authority told me that no detail is omitted to deceive the unwary, the original earth even being used to give the necessary appearance of genuineness, and it is only when the rascals begin to produce hieroglyphics that the fraud is instantly apparent to an expert.

It may be confidently asserted that thousands of ancient coins, ancient bronzes, and ancient statuary, excavated under the explorer’s very eyes were made in Birmingham, and reverentially laid in their sepulchres by some astute Armenian or Jew, only to be exhumed by a delighted antiquary. One of these gentry, not very long since, attempted to bribe with one hundred guineas a

high official at the British Museum, to alter the wording on a card to suit it to the requirements of a tract of country that had been carefully salted for excavation. The Raj of to-day possesses the Sacred Shrine and Mosque where the late Shah was assassinated. A chain across the road bars access to any but a believer, and it is a sanctuary for all criminals that reach its doors.

The suburban railway leading to Teheran is some five miles in length, and the journey occupies about twenty minutes. It is sad to think that all Persia might be as civilised as this little scrap, were it not for selfish Russia, who allows no one to construct a railway till she herself is ready to.

On the day of my visit to Raj, I had the good fortune to meet the Governor Djlio-Ed-Dowleh, a nephew of the Shah's, who in accordance with Persian etiquette halted with his retinue some few yards in front of me, and sent one of his equerries to inquire my name and business. His Highness then advanced, shook me by the hand and made me welcome, eventually sending two Ferashes to accompany me to the railway station.

During some recent excavations that were undertaken by a speculative native, some wonderful tiles were discovered and eventually sold in

Paris for about twenty thousand pounds. This transaction, however, eventually came to the notice of the authorities and the explorer had to disgorge half of the money. There is little doubt, in this district especially, that excavations on systematic lines would produce results of the highest importance ; nor would the procuring of a concession be a difficult matter, I imagine, if suitable arrangements were made for participation in the profits by the Government. The chief difficulty would be the deep-rooted suspicion in the Persian mind of everything that looks like an invasion by the foreigner, and until they can be brought back to their original belief that England has no aggressive designs on their country, it is quite possible that difficulties might have to be overcome. Since these lines were written there has been sent me from Teheran a series of photographs of some rare specimens of vases and other vessels in bronze and earthenware, that have been recently excavated from what is believed to have been an ancient sepulchre, one thousand years before the Christian era. A few samples from a small corner have since been valued in Paris at one hundred thousand francs, and the rest of the property, which presumably

contains similar relics, is now to be had in conformity with Persian law.

A village which adjoins the spot would be included in the purchase; but as Europeans are prohibited from owning more than ten thousand square yards of Persian soil, it is intended that a Persian subject under English control shall be the nominal owner of the larger tract, thus benefiting by the Legation protection that a British freeholder can claim.

On one occasion I met Asaph-Ed-Dowleh, chief of the Shashendi, a warlike tribe of nomads from the hills beyond Isfahan, a warrior, who can bring ten thousand horsemen into the field within a month. But perhaps one of the most curious experiences I had was on one Sunday afternoon when I had been invited to the country residence of the Grand Vizier. Conducted into the billiard-room, I had the honour of seeing His Highness in the act of ramming his adversary's ball into a pocket. Some fifty Persians were standing in respectful attitudes about the room, and making my way towards the scoring-board I ventured to peep at the score. The rate of progress may be set down at about fifteen points an hour, the scores respectively were seventeen and twenty-one,

and I was informed to my horror that the game was two hundred up. "Great heavens," I said to the marker, who was the resident physician, "I shall faint before they finish the game," and my remark happily attracting the Grand Vizier's attention, he was graciously pleased to invite me to sit down; coffee and cigars were then brought in, and I settled down to a two hours' enjoyment. The monotony of the game was occasionally relieved by trays of lollipops, radishes, and cauliflowers which were brought in by strings of attendants as humble offerings for the great man who was playing. Next a Kalia (water-pipe) would be brought to His Highness, who would inhale vigorously for a few minutes, and then again rush frantically into the fray. Had one been in India one would have imagined the room was infested with rattlesnakes, so terrific was the hubbub of the various "Kalias" in full blast. One regrets to discover subjects for ridicule, even where everything was so ridiculous, for a more hospitable host does not exist than this cultivated and powerful Persian.

Within the past six months two attempts have been made upon the Grand Vizier's life, and the gentleness of the Shah's rule may be inferred from

the fact that neither of these ruffians are suffering life-long incarceration, but are simply under detention pending a probably early release.

The Mint in Persia is the exclusive property of the Shah, and was formerly farmed out to a Jew, whose father was converted to Islam. This worthy, as Mint master, discovered that enormous profits were to be derived from the minting of coppers, and the country was flooded with these unwieldy coins, prepared from discs made in Birmingham. These were issued to the native bankers at an enormous discount, which, as the profits became apparent, increased so rapidly that the ancient silver Kran was sold in the Bazaar by weight and no one would accept copper coinage. Nickle coins were then gradually introduced from Belgium, the copper coin being collected, defaced and exported to Russia as copper. Shortly after this an Englishman was appointed as Mint master, but being an important post, the Russian Minister demanded as an equivalent that two Russian officials should be appointed to the Customs. At this, the Persian Government jibbed; two Cossacks in the Customs was not to be thought of, so the Englishman was sacrificed and the balance of

influence temporarily maintained. The present Mint master is a Belgian who came to Persia as financial adviser on the recommendation of Russia, but as there were no finances to advise upon he was placed in the mint vice the Englishman kicked out. This is the ordinary Russian procedure, and when the right moment arrives, the Belgian will get his congé and a Russian will take his place.

Two-Kran pieces are the only coins now minted, and find their way as far as China, ten different native banks importing silver ingots for this purpose. The transit of silver through Russia being prohibited, it can only reach Teheran *via* Bushire and the Gulf ports, a journey of eight hundred miles over an almost impassable road which on mule or camel takes seventy days. It is a curious fact that most of these silver ingots are purchased by Armenians in London, and find their way into Persia. As an instance of the harvest the converted Jew Mint master reaped during his short reign, it may be stated that the sum of fifty-two thousand francs (two thousand pounds) was paid by one society in Teheran in one year for changing their copper coin into silver.

There is an excellent tram service all over Teheran, which was originally instituted by a wealthy St Petersburg Jew (the Rothschild of Russia). This gentleman has since sold it—as we are asked to believe—to a Belgian Syndicate. It is, however, an open secret that the real owners are the Russian Government. It will be noted from this and other examples that have been cited, that Belgium at the present moment holds the proud position of middleman between Russia and Persia.

When trams were a novelty, accidents were of almost daily occurrence, caused by crowds not only standing on the rails, but jumping on and off the trams when in motion. These accidents invariably led to a riot when the mob usually seized the horses as security till compensation had been made, and the traffic was consequently suspended for some days. In one of these fatal riots, the driver was shot dead, as the blood for blood principle is in high favour in Persia.

A riot in Teheran at the first onset is always attended with danger, for the fanatical mob are amenable to no reason at the commencement, but are easily calmed by a sympathetic attitude when wiser counsels prevail. A serious disturbance was

averted some years ago during the corn riots, when a surging mass led by the Mullahs surrounded the Palace and demanded an interview with the Shah. His Majesty had, however, decided that the best way to meet the case was for him to slip out at one entrance whilst the mob was being harangued at the other. With this object the tram cars, whose route runs alongside the Palace, were directed to proceed at a gentle trot through the surging mass. On this the pent-up wrath of the Mullahs was turned upon the trams, and the crowd was invited to remove these Christian conveyances from what was undoubtedly Mohammedan ground. It was then that the resource of the English director came to the rescue, and whilst admitting that the ground on which they stood was Mohammedan, he pointed out that the vehicles themselves were undoubtedly English, and concluded by inviting his hearers to a free trip. The ruse succeeded admirably, and half a dozen trams, freighted to double their carrying capacity, proceeded at a brisk trot in every direction.

Water in Teheran is literally worth its weight in gold, and a scheme is now under consideration which has the sympathy and moral support of the

resident British Minister and the leading Persian officials. The chief stumbling-block is the Shah, who, whilst fully realising the advantages that would be conferred on his kingdom and Teheran in particular, hesitates to give his sanction for fear of offending his powerful ally and neighbour. The project may be briefly described as diverting the course of a tributary of the Shahrood River from a westerly to a southern flow, and for utilising the water now wasted for the irrigation of the plains between Teheran and Kasvin and the water supply of the two towns.

The river is estimated to carry 14,000,000 gallons per hour in summer, every drop of which runs to waste into the Caspian Sea, and when the snows melt in spring there are heavy floods, which swamp the adjacent villages and which the inhabitants are powerless to utilise. The district of Resht lost half their crop of rice last year owing to the scarcity of water, which, had it been properly controlled, would have represented a sum of upwards of two million sterling.

The mountain ranges of Persia usually run east and west, and the inclines at the foot of mountains are phenomenal and extend for miles. Thus the north side of Teheran is two hundred and forty

feet higher than the south side, and six miles further south it is three hundred and forty feet lower, so the nature and conformation of the ground offers every facility for laying pipes along its entire extent of forty-five miles. The valley, which consists of the alluvial deposit of centuries, has a gradual decline between its extremities of upwards of a thousand feet ; in fact, what is now being done with the Nile at Assouan could be done in a much simpler and less expensive way in the vicinity of Teheran.

Water in Persia is measured, bought, sold, or rented by the "sang," and a "sang" is a flow of water one yard in width, running at the rate of two miles an hour, being equal to about forty-seven thousand gallons ; and when it is stated that the price at present for the freehold of a "sang" is sixty-four thousand "tomans" (twelve hundred and eighty pounds), it will be seen that the profits that might reasonably be expected from a practical water scheme are incalculable. There are about fifty springs running into Teheran, each the monopoly of some wealthy Persian and sublet by the yard at usurious rates to the water consumers of the town. Every lessee, moreover, has literally to fight for the water he has purchased, to

say nothing of the drawbacks, such as clothes-washing and other horrors, which have been already described.

It may safely be assumed that a thorough scheme on European lines would represent an annual profit of at least a million and a quarter.





CHAPTER XVI

THE PEACOCK THRONE

THE trumpery appearance of the exterior of the Palace, conveys no notion of the wonders that its walls contain. It was during His Majesty's absence on a shooting expedition to Jaja-Rood, that I was permitted to pay a special visit and inspect the marvels of the Shah's Palace. Accompanied by Colonel Boyajian-Khan as interpreter and guide, I spent hours wandering from room to room, and minutely examining a series of contradictions it would be almost impossible to describe.

Entering the deserted precincts, I was received by three ragged Farrashes, who, preceding us at a respectful distance, conducted us to the Museum. It is here that the Shah permits a view of his sacred person once a year to his

loving subjects, when, seated on the Peacock Throne, the entire population, if so disposed, may do homage to their ruler. The so-called throne may be best described as a huge wooden trestle bed, nine feet long by about six wide. The woodwork, however, is absolutely invisible beneath its coating of diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires,—in many instances an inch long. Assuming all the stones to be real, as they undoubtedly were when it first came over from India a thousand years ago, the value may be safely computed—as stated by Lord Curzon—at one million sterling. With a mind filled with the many rumours that are in circulation, to the effect that certain of the stones are spurious, and that a system of petty larceny has from time to time removed a gem and substituted coloured glass, I endeavoured to detect the fraud, but am bound to confess that none of the stones I examined gave any indication in their barbaric uncut splendour of being anything but gems of the purest water.

Upon the floor of the wooden trestle was a carpet so thickly studded with pearls as to be absolutely invisible, upon which no foot but that of the King of Kings has trodden; whilst resting

upon it was a chair equally studded with precious stones, with a fan-shaped cluster of jewels above it, from which the title of the throne doubtless takes its origin.

Passing along the walls, one would come first upon a painting of priceless value by an ancient master, whilst next to it would be a Birmingham tradesman's advertisement card of fish-hooks sumptuously framed; next would be a vase of turquoise and pearls, and alongside it a few cheap mugs such as may be seen at a country fair. On its right would be a series of mechanical clocks and toys—elephants that wagged their tails—dogs that barked when you turned a handle—clocks in the shape of pagodas that every hour poured forth streams of pearls from sundry fountains, and then a huge clock by a London maker that indicated the time of every capital in the world.

Continuing our progress, our attention was riveted by a pretentious painting by the late Shah, describing a mountain suspended in space between a deep blue sky and a bright green landscape, with a colossal tree whose every leaf faced the observer on the one side, and a diminutive poppy of the reddest hue on the other.

Next would be a coloured front-page of *Le Petit Journal* and a dozen French daubs of various kinds, alongside of which were cases of priceless china in dessert and dinner services.

In many instances large gaps upon the wall attracted my attention, and I asked my companion for an explanation. He informed me that it was attributable to the periodical thefts that were known to go on, and which nobody appeared disposed to take steps to prevent ; that it was no uncommon thing for specimens from these various sets to find their way to the Bazaar and be publicly offered for sale, and that although for years he had submitted the desirability of a catalogue, his suggestions were of no avail, and the present state of affairs might be expected to continue for all time.

Continuing our way we next entered a room richly carpeted, but lumbered with deal cases—some unopened, others with their lids off and the litter strewn in all directions—whilst here and there a dozen dinner services of various qualities, photographic apparatuses and cameras of every shape and size, were piled up three feet high ; bronze and imitation bronze gas fittings, electric light appliances, grotesque statuary—mementoes

of the Shah's late visit to Europe, and standing monuments of the way he was fleeced by the enterprising tradesmen of civilisation.

I was told that no package was ever opened except in His Majesty's presence, and that one of his chief delights was to be buried elbow deep amidst the straw and to scatter the contents about the floor. The last time this recreation was indulged in, I was informed, was about a year ago, and that he had long since tired of the gimcracks. As he is probably now looking forward to the purchase of other novelties on his projected tour, it is reasonable to suppose that the *débris* I saw will not be disturbed for a considerable period, and that the pickings of his courtiers will be proportionately increased.

An apartment that specially attracted my attention was the Sovereigns' Room, where every monarch of Europe was portrayed by a full length oil painting. The only exception was our own late lamented Queen, a small engraving of whom was all that represented the Majesty of England. I wondered at the time who was responsible for this impolitic and cheese-paring policy, and felt it was only in keeping with the numerous other trifles that tend to convey to the Persian mind

an erroneous impression of the mighty power of England.

Passing through the billiard-room which contained an English and French table of the very latest design, I entered what I was informed was the Shah's favourite writing-room. Scattered about were escritoirs and writing appliances of the highest French and Russian manufacture, whilst on the floor near the windows were the plush mattresses on which His Majesty smoked and contemplated the gardens without. But the article that claimed my closest attention was a terrestrial globe about a yard in diameter, such as may be seen in an ordinary schoolroom. How can I describe the wonders of this wonderful educational medium? Conceive the four continents, one in enormous sapphires, another in emeralds the size of your thumb, a third in diamonds an inch long, and the fourth in rubies of the same dimensions. Imagine every name written in diamonds and every river indicated by sparkling gems, and some notion may be gained of the dazzling sight that presented itself. It occurred to me that a small bradawl and pocket hammer was all that was required to complete the prospect; that one should have been left

severely alone for ten minutes, and no questions asked on leaving the premises.

The entire ceilings of all these various rooms and corridors were one mass of crystal facets, and suggested the "hall of the thousand mirrors" in the Arabian Nights.

One other item, only shown to specially favoured visitors, was two chests stuffed to overflowing with ropes of enormous pearls; these have lately been transferred to the cellars, as there was reason to believe that their theft was attempted some time ago. The value of these baubles may be estimated by the offer of 25,000,000 francs recently made by a French jeweller, who came specially to Teheran at His Majesty's request. It seems incredible that with such securities rotting in every direction, Muzaffar-Ed-Din should prefer social and political extinction at the hands of Russia.

Passing into the gardens, we traversed the entire length of an orangery, with a streamlet full of gold fish meandering amongst the exotics, and the wheeled chair in which His Majesty takes the air. During the three hours of my wanderings not a sound broke the silence. Five human beings—myself, my conductor, and the three ragged "Farrashes" were apparently the sole representa-

tives of mortality ; when His Majesty is in residence, however, all these deserted rooms teem with suppliants, courtiers, ministers and everything and everybody who has anything to say, or do, or the contrary. On these occasions the long flight of steps that lead from the orangery are devoted to the deposit of boots, which no Persian is permitted to wear in the presence of the sovereign ; boots that would fit an elephant, shoes that would be tight on a cork leg, boots in the last stage of decay, and new French pumps, have all to be discarded in this national Valhalla for leather.

On the day that His Majesty honoured me with an audience, the solitude I had last traversed was one mass of life. Threading my way through a series of thronged ante-rooms, I entered the billiard room, accompanied by a court official. Exactly at the same moment, from a door on the opposite side, entered a delicate looking man of some forty years attired in a light suit, leaning on a stick, and with nothing to show that he was anything but an ordinary European gentleman, save the Persian hat surmounted with a modest aigrette. Immediately behind him was the Atabak Azam, the Grand Vizier of Persia, and the most powerful personage in the land.

Beckoning me to advance, His Majesty expressed a hope that I had enjoyed my visit to Persia, and after a few references to his contemplated visit to England this informal interview terminated. It was with feelings of mingled admiration and pity that I contemplated the fragile figure before me, and hoped that the day was not far distant when a new era would dawn upon Persia by the aid of her ancient ally.

But the circumstance in which the Shah's personality most appealed to my imagination was when, surrounded by barbaric splendour, and preceded by two hundred horsemen, he was seated in his carriage on his way to Jaja-Rood or Lash-karak. Cossacks with long hunting crops galloping round the cortège and driving off the mendicants from his immediate vicinity; strings of closed carriages containing the harem, and the companies of foot soldiers bringing up the rear—all brought back to one's mind the gorgeous pictures of what the ancient kings of Persia were, and one forgot for the moment that the nervous solitary man with a loaded pistol on either side of him was a prey to mental and bodily agony, which the humblest of us would hardly envy.

Visiting the Palace is not an economical luxury,

for everybody has to be propitiated with bachsheesh. As I made my exit from the outer gate and was about to enter my carriage, the sentry who had just presented arms to me reminded me that I had not tipped him. Searching my pocket for a coin, it was refreshing to see him drop his rifle and run to receive it, and turning round after proceeding a few yards I observed that he had again come to the "present," whilst with one hand he was wafting me a graceful adieu.

This instance of gratitude combined with a strict regard to military etiquette was peculiarly gratifying.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHAH'S ARMY

THE Persian army on a war footing can with difficulty be raised to 40,000 men ; of these it may safely be asserted that the majority—if not the entire lot—would be useless, if not absolutely dangerous to themselves and their allies. The only portion with any resemblance to discipline is found in Teheran, where an excellent corps of 600 Cossacks and 200 Infantry (of which 140 are bandsmen), are decently clothed, march with some degree of regularity, and show signs of having undergone some sort of drill. As the late Sir Henry Rawlinson asserted many years ago, “The raw material in the Persians is capable of providing excellent soldiers”; and with our past experience of what can be done with Egyptian soldiery, it is lamentable to see so much that is good degenerating from sheer neglect.

The 600 Cossacks, who are dressed similar to their Russian example—except that their clothing is black instead of grey—are under the sole command of the resident Russian Cossack General (Kosagofski), and may be accepted as constituting a serviceable body of men.

On the occasion of the late Shah's assassination, for instance, when it was deemed advisable to conceal the fact that he was dead until certain precautionary measures had been taken, it was this corps that was posted at the various commanding positions in Teheran before the present sovereign was proclaimed. Of the rest of the garrison it is less easy to form an estimate, as their duties consist apparently in escorting the Shah through the streets, but none of them are worth serious consideration from the fact that they are armed with a dozen different kinds of obsolete rifles, not one of which is provided with suitable ammunition. Beyond these there is a further considerable force which, to judge by the scores of mule-drivers, scavengers and porters,—all soldiers,—must consist of some 5000 men. Only a small portion are used daily to supply the various Legation Guards, and these are a scandal as regards equipment, discipline and uniform.

The Persian soldier receives two and sixpence per month and a few handfuls of corn, and is permitted to accept employment of any kind provided he pays heavy bachsheesh to his officer. Uniform is also provided on his first becoming a soldier ; but I should suppose that it was never afterwards renewed, as not only are they in the most imaginably ragged state, but some are bootless and shoeless, while others may be seen on parade in tunics and billycock hats, or in ulsters surmounted by a shako.

That the general efficiency of the army is not of a high order may be instanced. On the last occasion on which its services were required, it took twenty days to mobilise and then only twenty thousand men rallied to the standard. This was during the Kurd rebellion when that warlike tribe ravaged the country for miles around ; nor was the advance made for a further period of three months, as every general insisted on taking his division by a different route until sanction was given for a "go as you please" advance. Meanwhile the Kurds having concluded their business, had returned to their homes, and the army on arrival, finding no enemy to confront, returned to Teheran. Medals were lavishly distributed to commemorate this glorious campaign.

The finest soldiers in Persia are unquestionably the Bakhtiari tribe—warriors from the mountains beyond Isfahan—whose chief is permanently retained as a hostage in the Capital. Their numbers are estimated at some five thousand horsemen, and a small detachment which garrisons Teheran are conspicuous by their huge white sheepskin busbies, and superb horses.

The Kashan and Yezd districts bear the unenviable reputation of being so cowardly that they are exempted from supplying soldiers. This decision was arrived at after the Kurdish rebellion of 1880, when, after being disbanded, they applied for the escort of a regiment to protect them through the disturbed districts on their return home.

The Kashkai tribe on the Persian Gulf constitutes another magnificent race of warriors, and it is not fair to judge of the Persian race by the effeminate specimens of humanity native to Teheran and Tabriz.

The arming—or to speak more accurately the non-arming—of the Persian army is said to be attributable to Russian policy, which does not care for the risk of effective weapons being one day turned on Russia, and although every one who has eyes to see, and ears to hear, can detect this

palpable manipulation of the cards, the silly Shah and his silly ministers dream in their fool's paradise that to be Russian body and soul is to purchase immunity from every danger, and protection from the aggressive Britisher.

Apropos of the artillery an authentic story was told me of an enterprising firm of "quick-firing" gunmakers, and their desire to bring their wares to the favourable notice of the Government. Arriving at Bushire with numerous ponderous specimens, the hopeful trader succeeded after many months in dragging them up to Teheran. Here his expenditure in bachsheesh was lavish, and everybody from the highest official to the lowest back-stair sweeper was propitiated in some way. Promises moreover were not stinted, and an audience of the Shah was only a question of days. Meanwhile time jogged on, till, after weary months of waiting, the sporting trader lost faith, packed his goods and disappeared. Later on he published a scathing book entitled "Persia in Extremis," but the work I understand never attained a circulation proportionate to its merits.

That bachsheesh must be freely indulged in if one hopes for anything, however small, is an undeniable fact, but whether a judicious proportion

only of favours to come should be dispensed at the commencement, depends on the extent to which one is prepared to be fleeced. Indefinite postponement of *largesse* is, on the other hand, equally fatal, as the case of a silly native under my observation testifies. Day by day this monument of faith and hope who aspires to being a Khan, may be seen, boots in hand, meekly waiting at the foot of the Foreign Office stairs for the summons that never comes, and all because he has omitted the usual fees to the Grand Vizier's coachman, and the various servants that throng the passages.

How different is the reception under "recognised" circumstances; served with tea and cigarettes and then bowed into the audience chamber, and all by the judicious expenditure of a couple of coins the size of five shilling pieces and worth ninepence, that lend themselves to cheap display.

If one may venture to express an opinion apparently adverse to that of her military advisers, whose endeavours we will assume to be actuated by the honest desire to see Persia strong, the best means of attaining that end would be the constitution of her entire military force into mounted infantry. Taking the ordinary strength to be

30,000 men, and each man equipped as their present Cossacks, it would require little elaboration of this universal system for a percentage to be trained as efficient artillery men and engineers, available at a moment's notice for service with any portion of the mounted infantry. Abolishing, meanwhile, the various fantastic uniforms that make brave men appear ridiculous, arming every man with a reliable rifle, and devoting a fortnight annually to their individual mastery of the weapon, there is no reason why in time a force sufficiently organised to be a "position" anywhere, should not be created, and become a valuable ally for offence or defence. To extend the system, military stations might be established in the various provinces of the kingdom, whence outlying posts of ten and twenty men could be detached, providing thereby an efficient patrolling force, combining the duties of soldiery and police.

The persistent retention of obsolete artillery and worthless rifles, the crowding of her arsenals with arms little better than old iron, should no longer be continued, unless Persia is prepared to await with resignation a very rough awakening, with neither the time nor the opportunity for setting her house in order.

I ventured during my residence in Teheran to submit to His Highness the Grand Vizier this scheme, whereby the entire Persian army should be a Cossack force, with units specially drilled in artillery and engineering practice, and thus constituting a force, drilled alike, armed alike, and capable of rapid concentration in any part of the kingdom. I delicately added that it would tend to the efficiency of the force if the present armaments of rifles, guns, etc., etc., were burnt, and serviceable weapons substituted for them. The proposal was highly approved, and like all other proposals that are approved in Persia, may or may not come into force between this and the millennium.

General Maletta is, without exception, the most valuable man in the Persian army. An Italian by birth, and a cavalry officer by profession, he eventually joined the Egyptian army in the Soudan, and took part in all the principal engagements in conjunction with the British forces. Three times a week a parade of some 2000 men takes place under him for some two or three hours, and he often bewailed to me the heart-breaking process of trying to make any progress with the Persian army or the Persian Government. But

these three weekly drills on paper really resolved themselves into some fifty parades a year. During the Ramazan, for example, all parades are suspended, and the same applies to the Maharram festival, the Mohammedan New Year, and the dozen other holidays that constitute the Persian year.

The garrison of Teheran is composed of two local regiments of infantry, six batteries of artillery, and 600 Cossacks. This force is augmented by six battalions of territorial regiments from every part of Persia who come to the capital for one year's service, and then return to their homes to develop into mule drivers, scavengers, and tag-rag generally.

The infantry as a fighting force are beneath contempt. At least a dozen different patterns of rifles constitute their armament, consisting of matchlocks, flint locks, sniders, Martinis, obsolete Russian guns, and a portion of a cargo of a nondescript description, that was seized some years ago in the Persian Gulf. When it is added that there is not a round of ammunition to fit any of the above weapons, some idea of the value of their 40,000 men may be formed.

The artillery may be honestly described as a

formidable body to themselves, if not to their enemies. Every gun is of the oldest and brassiest calibre, and when rammed half full of powder, have a way of blowing off arms, legs and heads of the various gunners serving them.

The Cossacks on the other hand are a splendid body of men and may be truthfully described as a smart force of irregular cavalry. Exclusively drilled by Russian officers and under the sole command of the resident Russian Cossack General Kosagofski, they form the nucleus of what the entire Persian army should be.

I had expressed a wish to General Maletta to see a review of the garrison before I left Teheran, and on the 15th of last February I was invited to witness a review when (in the words of an Alder-shot command) "every man was to be in the ranks, sick and on duty excepted." On the right of the first line was a company of red-trousered, lace-jacketed warriors, numbering some thirty files; in their rear was their band of a similar strength and more grotesquely attired than the fighting line. This was the Shah's body-guard, the elite of the Persian army, the household troops of Teheran. Extending in two lines were eight other battalions, some in uniform, some without, some in cocked

hats and some in ulsters, forming a mass of worthless soldiery it is impossible to exaggerate. Every time they advanced, eight bands with at least twenty drums, struck up a terrific din with which the jabber of the troops agreeably harmonised; then they advanced in line and retired by fours (or fourteens) to the rear, and concluded with a series of obsolete movements in the slowest of slow time. An advance in *eschelon* of battalions got them into a hopeless fix, and nothing but the braying of fifty trumpets and the banging of fifty drums enabled them to reform. Eventually the entire force "marched past," and it was painful to notice the expression of despair on the face of the unhappy General Maletta as the troops marched off the ground.

The barracks in Teheran are a splendid set of buildings, consisting of two squares considerably larger than the Royal Barracks in Dublin, but nobody occupies the quarters, and the squares are only used for the periodical farces I have described.

Incredible as it may appear, this marvellous military (dis)organisation possesses a minister of war, a commander-in-chief and numerous drill instructors of German, Italian and Russian nationality, all practically under the orders of the resident

Russian General Kosagofski. I would undertake, nevertheless, that a battalion of the "North Corks," with the Margate Fusiliers in support, commanded by a colonel of Yeomanry, with a green-grocer as chief of the staff, would within a week annihilate the entire army—artillery, cavalry and infantry.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RUSSIAN OCTOPUS

RUSSIA'S first coquetting with Persia began in 1828, when a treaty more or less harmless—though capable of expansion—was concluded on the subject of the Customs Tariff. The development is by no means concluded yet, but a rather tough link was riveted as late as 10th November 1890, and it is on this elastic document that the present deadlock appears to centre. I will produce this “secret” convention in its entirety later on; meanwhile let us examine the extent of its ramifications.

No railway can at this moment be constructed in Persia; the New Customs Tariff cannot be completed or passed into law until approved by Russia; turnpike tolls—by no means scarce—are all in the hands of Russia; no vehicle can enter

Kasvin (on the high road from Europe and the Caspian Sea) without paying toll to a Russian company; the entire country between Julfa (on the Russian eastern frontier) and Tabriz—a distance of 200 miles; and between Tabriz and Teheran—a distance of 400 miles—has quite recently been surveyed by Russian officials with the ostensible purpose of making roads; the entire route between Resht and Anzali on the Caspian Sea (and the direct road from Europe to Teheran) is in the hands of Russian companies, both as regards post carts and post stations; the Shah cannot purchase a rifle without the approval of the resident Cossack General, and as to raising money by a foreign loan or by the granting of concessions for mining or any other purpose known to free agents, it is simply prohibited in accordance with a bushel of protocols, treaties, and conventions between the two high contracting powers.

People may ask: "But did England allow all this?" England, whose Indian Empire adjoins Persia on the gulf; England, who professed such anxiety at Lord Roberts' assertion in the House of Lords as to Russia being within striking distance of India across Afghanistan? One can picture optimists referring to the map and ridiculing such

preposterous ideas, considering that Persia is many times larger than Afghanistan, and consequently a proportionately larger buffer between India and Russia. But Persia at this moment is in everything but name, a Russian province. Two hundred Cossacks could seize and hold the entire country, and, moreover, be acclaimed by the starving, down-trodden populace as their deliverers from a cruel yoke. Alas! they do not know Russia and Russian methods, and have never heard of Siberia nor the tale of the "Frying Pan and the Fire."

Persia in area is about equal to Germany and France combined, with a population less than double that of London; and this eight millions of starving humanity populates the country on an average of about two to the square mile.

Russia, meanwhile, is creeping slowly and stealthily along, and, when the propitious moment arrives, will again boldly demand a coaling station on the Persian Gulf, as she did lately, but immediately dropped the subject on England raising an objection. As a fact, her railway schemes in Manchuria and Siberia are not sufficiently elaborated; but when they are, the demand will assuredly be made again, backed by 200,000

Cossacks, whom, doubtless, we shall confront with 10,000 Sikhs on the Persian Gulf. What the result will be it is not difficult to conjecture.

Assuming all this to be an ungarnished statement of facts, let us inquire how it all came about? In Teheran we have a Minister Plenipotentiary, and Consuls-General in Tabriz, Isfahan and Bushire; it is absurd, then, to suppose all this could be going on without the cognisance of our Foreign Office, and it may be asserted, without the possibility of contradiction (except official denial, which goes for nothing), that not only was this, and the last iniquitous Russian loan of two and a half millions sterling, known to the British Minister, but the Foreign Office was implored by him almost on his (official) knees to take up the loan, and not to leave it to Russia. His appeal however was rejected, his Excellency was publicly snubbed, and later on—to cover their blunder—he was privately promoted to Madrid, and made a G.C.M.G. Sir Mortimer Durand, during whose time as Minister at Teheran this official crime was perpetrated, has the reputation of being a shrewd diplomatist, a staunch Englishman, and very jealous of any encroachments on British prestige; but all these virtues

without the support of Downing Street are worthless attributes, and so matters drifted into their present undesirable position.

When the Shah contemplated his last visit to Europe—and finding the national coffers quite unequal to supplying the necessary funds—he turned, in the first instance, to English capitalists. Here he met with his first rebuff—as short-sighted as it has proved impolitic—not a farthing would London advance; “he was in debt to many of them at that very moment; he could never pay; he never would, even if he could”; such were the comments that accompanied the refusal. But has Persia ever repudiated her obligations? Can one single instance be adduced where, if she has postponed payment, she has not invariably paid twelve per cent. for the consideration, and eventually paid in full?

It is sufficient to know that our great financiers never paused to inquire, they simply refused unless the Government guaranteed the payment. At this stage, the Foreign Office comes on the scene, and we will see how, in its wisdom, it grasped the situation by courting a diplomatic defeat, when success—God knows how far-reaching—was unexpectedly put within its reach. It

decided that anything short of a control of the Customs by British officials could not be entertained, and as this concession would have created a revolution even amongst the meek and gentle Persians, the matter fell through. Had Lord Beaconsfield exercised a similar discretion in the case of the Suez Canal, where would Egypt be now, and what the condition of the Soudan? Sir Mortimer Durand accepted his snubbing meekly, and the Foreign Office eventually promoted the man who, by covering their error, had borne the odium of a mistake worse than a crime.

It was now Russia's opportunity, and, like the disinterested friend she has always proved herself to every nation within "striking distance," she generously offered a loan of two and a half millions sterling. "She sought no such absurd conditions as the supervision of the customs; Persia and Russia were allies and neighbours; the money was at her disposal; should she send for pens, ink and paper?" This was practically the song of the alluring siren, and, needless to add, the disinterested offer was greedily and gratefully accepted.

Russia's strength consists in her knowledge of human nature and the way in which she makes

special circumstances meet special cases ; like the modern usurer, she is amiability itself during negotiations ; it is only when the deed is signed, the bill of sale registered, that she unmaskes her batteries, and imposes her terms with the alternative of annihilation if refused. Poor Persia did not gain much by refusing England's and accepting Russia's terms, and after a preamble that would have bewildered an Old Bailey lawyer, a short clause was inserted to the effect that, if the half yearly instalments of interest were not paid to the tick, Russia was entitled to seize the Customs. Up to now this condition has been scrupulously complied with ; how long it will last remains to be seen.

Another insignificant clause beneath the notice of his impecunious Majesty panting for the flesh-pots of Paris and Ostend, stipulated that this loan could under no circumstances be redeemed for a period of ten years, during which time Persia was debarred from borrowing from any other nation under any circumstances whatever. The first-fruits of this monstrous blunder, so far as British prestige and British interests were concerned, was the prompt payment of every British claim, to the uttermost farthing. Russia now turned her attention to the

despised Customs, and suggested that the new tariff on imports and exports (at present five per cent. all round) should be submitted to her for approval before passing into law.

This is now being done.

The Persian Customs are the best-managed departments in the kingdom. Some years ago a shrewd Belgian sought his fortunes in Persia, rising by degrees till at the present time he occupies a high position with a high salary, the rank of Minister, and the title of Excellency.

The railway question has always been jealously controlled by Russia, with the full intention of turning her attention to their construction in her own good time; the time, however, has apparently not yet come, her hands being too full with her Siberian and Manchurian projects, but when this host of designers, constructors, contractors, etc., can be spared, there can be little doubt of their destination. Even during my stay in Teheran numerous Russian officials have been trekking northward towards Askabad, where tons of railway plant are known to be stacked; a high Russian official and railway expert passed through Teheran last January, and on my return journey towards the Caspian Sea I passed a dozen waggon-

loads of Muscovites who are methodically and silently increasing the resident population of Persia. In one's innocence one had always believed that by some unwritten understanding, Persia was practically divided into two divisions—Northern, where Russian, and Southern, where British, interests were paramount; this, however, is a delusion, and anyone who cares to judge for himself on the spot will not be long before arriving at a similar conclusion.

With the Indian frontier and Baluchistan abutting on Persia, one might reasonably have assumed that any prohibitions by another Power as to railways on the Persian Gulf, would have called forth some enquiry, or request for explanation on the part of the British Government, but here again one's ignorance of things diplomatic becomes apparent, as will be shown by the following verbatim copy of

A SECRET CONVENTION

November 10th, 1890.

“For a period of ten years beginning from the date of the signature of this convention the

Persian Government engages neither to construct a railway in Persia, nor permit others to do so, and will not grant any concession for the construction of railways in Persia to anyone.

“After the expiration of the period of ten years, the contracting parties will discuss the prolongation or renewal of this convention.

“By ‘Railway’ is to be understood, any rail-road upon which steam or other motive power is used, and all railways in Persia are included in this convention. Tramways with motive power of horses, and in towns and their environs, are not included in this convention, neither is a railway from Teheran to Shimran, where the summer residences of H.M. the Shah are situated, a distance of two farsakhs.”

It may be taken for granted, however, that despite the aforesaid convention a very clear understanding exists that if Russia begins railway construction in the north, England has a similar privilege in the south; the general outline of which is more fully described in the next chapter.

The Convention of 1890 has since been renewed till 1905, and it is satisfactory to know that no

extended prohibitions as regards railways are included amongst the conditions of the new Loan of £850,000, which has been dragging its weary length along during the past year, and cannot yet be considered as completed, despite Russian official assurance to the contrary (May 1902). The Russian official version is as follows ; and it may enable the reader to arrive at a proper estimate of the position by comparing it with what are the undoubted facts of the case.

“ As is known, the Russian Imperial Government, in 1900, permitted the Discount and Loan Bank of Persia to take up a five per cent. Gold Loan issued by the Persian Government in that year to the amount of 22,500,000 roubles, on the security of the whole of the Persian Customs revenue, with the exception of the revenue of the Customs Houses on the Persian Gulf and the ports of Farsistan. At the request of the Government of the Shah the Russian Imperial Government has now permitted the said bank to take up a new loan of 10,000,000 roubles, under the designation of Five per Cent. Persian Gold Loan of the year of 1902. This loan will be issued by the Persian Government on the security of the same Customs receipt as are assigned to guarantee the payments for the redemption of

the loan of 1900 and on the same conditions as those existing for that loan."

THE FACTS DIVESTED OF OFFICIALISM.

Up to April last two hundred thousand pounds was the entire amount that had reached Teheran, and this in bar silver. It had been arranged (the Russian resident Minister having ordered it, and the Grand Vizier humbly acquiescing) that the remainder of the loan should be paid on Russian soil on the Shah's return journey to Persia. The Mullahs apparently had likewise been enlisted under the Russian banner, and after forbidding the Shah to carry out his projected visit to Europe, eventually withdrew the prohibition on the understanding that the Loan should be devoted to the amelioration of the condition of the starving population of Persia. But how this unhappy monarch can possibly fulfil his promise it is impossible to conceive. The million's use is pre-arranged a dozen times over, and unless a thunder-bolt is launched from the clear sky, the choice between "the devil and the deep blue sea" will be nothing as compared to that which His Majesty will have to make between the Mullahs and the Czar.

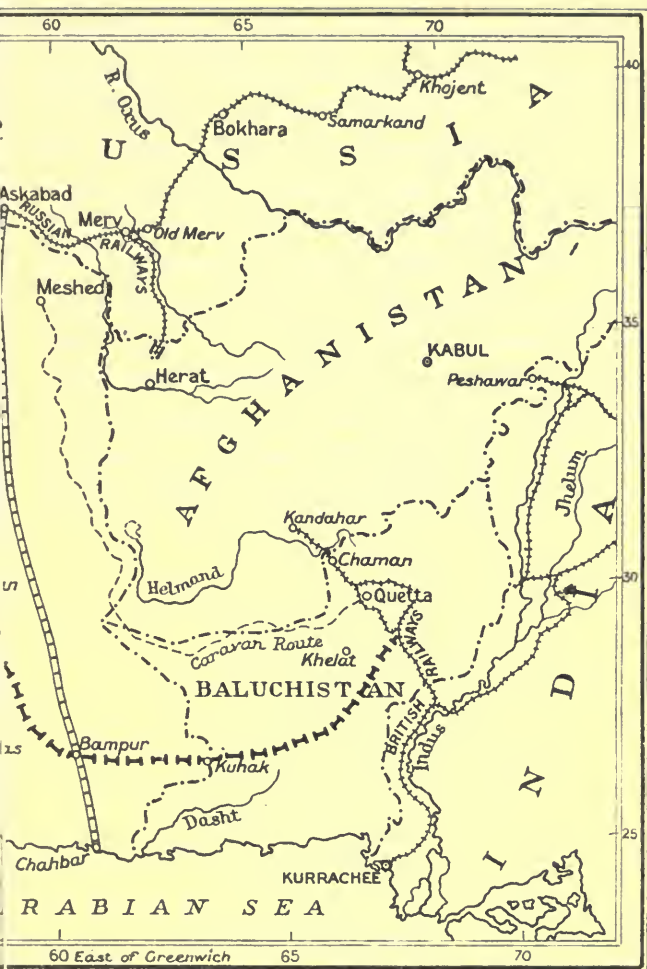
But British interests at the moment are in resolute hands; the English mastiff chained to this distant outpost of India is very jealous of British supremacy, and is not likely to be caught napping; and although making "leeway" is probably as disheartening in diplomacy as it is in navigation, it may be fairly assumed that, firmly supported by the Home Government, British interests will not suffer in the experienced hands of Sir Arthur Hardinge. Through his representations, outward and visible signs of England's majesty have lately become apparent at the British Consulates at Isfahan and Bushire and a guard of Indian troops now does duty over the old flag.

How different all this is to our unpretentious consulate at Tabriz! As I contemplated the dilapidated arms of England not many weeks ago, it seemed to me as if a tear trembled in the eye of each of its supporters; the curl in the Lion's tail was barely perceptible, and the Unicorn looked as if he hadn't a kick in him.

The Shah is not a character to be admired—weak-minded, frivolous, selfish, and a despot. Imagine him, however, free of all anxieties, dread of penalties, and fairly in funds—what sensations

would not be his! In a few hours changed—matured as it were—from the boy to the man, hitherto only the leaf before the Russian wind, the puppet of every new impression; now, circumstances which for years had been leading him along in such soft fetters, become his deadly foe; and all his energy and cunning, all his little knowledge of man and of society, rise up sturdily and shrewdly to fight in this new cause; Russia no longer a phenomenon to be wondered at, but an instrument to be used, Muzaffar-ed-din would be inspired with new and legitimate aspirations, and the dawn of modern Persia would have begun.





CHAPTER XIX

RAILWAY ENTERPRISE

TO make the following chapter intelligible, and to convince the reader of the gross injury being done to Persia by the Russian Convention against the construction of railways, a reference to the accompanying map will not be amiss. Taking Teheran as the imaginary centre of an imaginary quadrangle, with Bagdad on the west and Herat on the east, Askabad on the north, and Chalibar on the south, what an opening up of this unhappy country would follow if any of the projects that have been put forward from time to time could be brought to maturity.

In the west is the German scheme — under arrangement with Turkey — for the so-called Bagdad line, whereby London and Paris, *via* Constantinople, would be brought within six days' journey of Teheran. But here, alas, is an obstacle difficult to surmount and which cannot

be laid at the door of Russia. The concessionaires, it appears, before investing their capital demand an annual guarantee of one million sterling, and this poor bankrupt Turkey is not prepared to offer ; hence a deadlock that seems likely to be serious. The iradé, however, lately granted by Turkey to the German Company for the extension of their system to Fao gives them the long coveted seaboard on the Persian Gulf. It may therefore be assumed that means will be taken to remove the deadlock above referred to in face of the incalculable advantages attained thereby.

The Russian press is unanimous in its description of "the menace offered thereby to her Eastern projects," and "the earnest hope that England may see things in a similar light."

Admitting for the moment that Germany is an "unknown quantity," ought any Englishman to object to German advance in any direction? If her enterprise arouses our lethargic traders to more life, so much the better for those who benefit by competition ; and none but Russian eyes can detect therein a hostile neighbour, or anything other than a nation whose interests by every tie of blood and geography are identical with our own.

England's natural ally is Germany. Shoulder to shoulder in war, and deadly rivals in commerce, the alliance would defy the world, keep in wholesome check that voracious maw, which, gobbling up everything itself, begrudges even the crumbs to her honest neighbours. Assuming that a concession was granted, passing Bagdad the line would continue *via* Kermanshah to Teheran (370 miles); or taking a wider circuit *via* Khoremmabad and Sultanabad (470 miles) to the same terminus; or still further extending the route, touching Isfahan, with a central terminus at Teheran (540 miles). The line would then be continued through Yezd and Kerman in the direction of Manipur, and thus be within measurable distance of the Quetta Extension now in projection. This British line would thus intersect the Russian line from Askabad at either Kerman or Manipur. These various lines in addition to intersecting the great caravan routes between Bagdad and Tabriz, Meshed and Nishapur, would traverse the chief centres of industry in textiles and carpets, and through local branches would bring the products of Eastern Persia and India within easy reach of the market, which at present involves a long and precarious journey.

The new Siestan Caravan Route from India to Meshed (Meshed is the distributing point for merchandise of the various caravans east and west), would thus be in immediate railway contact with every province of Persia. Transporting ourselves to Bushire in the south, what advantage would not accrue if the seven hundred miles of to-day, with its express post of fourteen days and ordinary conveyance of seventy days to Teheran, was bridged over by a railway journey of forty-eight hours? And looking further east, if the projected Anglo-Indian railway from Karrachee and Bombay joined hands with the Persian line on the frontier of Beluchistan, what inestimable benefits to the Indian trader, and Persia generally, would not be opened up.

In 1895 a wealthy London syndicate proposed to the Persian Government a scheme for a railway from the Mediterranean across Syria to the shores of the Persian Gulf, and from thence to Karrachee. Again in 1896 another syndicate applied for a concession to construct a line from Bassorah to Karrachee. This proposal was based on a provisional concession obtained from Turkey carrying what was described as the Alexandretta and Bassorah Railway between Ada-Bazaar and Diarbekir, with

branches from Amorsia to the port of Sinop and thence to Bassorah ; but no results followed. As far back as 1857 the British Government was prepared to further this scheme, and but for political objections, it would have obtained the practical support of Lord Palmerston.

In 1872 again, a Parliamentary Committee reported favourably on the construction of a railway through the Euphrates Valley, *via* Alexandretta, Aleppo, and Bassorah, but the project fell through on strategical rather than commercial grounds. And a reference to the secret protocol (chapter xviii.), will convince the most sanguine that no results are ever likely to accrue. Russia, for her own selfish ends, has no idea of permitting Persia to discover her almost inexhaustible mineral resources, and with "steam up"—to speak figuratively—at Bagdad, Karrachee, and Julfa (for the extension from Tiflis may be confidently expected within the year) the entire "system" is disorganised, traffic is stopped, and commercial enterprise paralysed, because one nation vetoes it, and the world humbly acquiesces.

The Russian railway on the Black Sea has its eventual extension—as most people are aware—in the direction of Turkestan. What if Russia

were to say: "We have a convention whereby no railways can be constructed in Persia. But for a consideration, and to show our *bona fides*, England will not be opposed by us, if she elects to construct a line from Bagdad to Teheran, and thence in the direction of Quetta, we reserving to ourselves the right of constructing a line from Meshed to Bunder-Abbas. To still further prove how groundless are the rumours of our seeking a station on the Persian Gulf, we recognise that England's field for railway enterprise is in the South and ours diametrically opposite."

With such a network of railway, what would be the result of opening up the vast resources of Persia?

Lead and copper are to be found in every district, and although worked from the remotest times are practically untouched to any considerable extent. Many of the lead ores are argentiferous, although the precious metal has never been extracted. Tin is to be found in Azerbaizar, antimony near Yezd, zinc near Teheran, and enormous deposits of rich iron in various known directions. Coal also of excellent quality is to be found near Teheran, and immense seams in South-Eastern Persia have never been worked. The

petroleum concessions in the South, lately granted to a wealthy Australian, will eventually open up an immense field for British enterprise, but until greater facilities for its transport exist, the chief difficulty lies in the absence of roads either towards the Caspian or the Gulf.

Salt is abundant, and sulphur in lesser quantities. A naphtha-bearing zone extends from Kurdistan to the Persian Gulf. Turquoise mines exist near Nishapur, and the pearl fisheries at Bahrem and Lingah on the Persian Gulf bring in an annual revenue of three million rupees.

Significant also is the bitterness of the Russian Press against Germany, on account of the Bagdad Railway and the suspicion that she has been backing up Turkey in her late dispute with France, it declaring that the growth of German influence in Turkey is dangerous to Russia.

The proposal of any understanding between England and Russia, in face of the latter's palpable desire to gain time, seems a suicidal policy. The raw material for an Anglo-Russian agreement may be apparent to the ordinary looker on, but the analyst must surely detect the alloy. With Prince Lebanoff's policy—"No war with anyone till the Siberian and Manchurian Railway is

finished," surely now or never is the time to press our claims. And if England lets matters slide till then, her position in the Persian Gulf will be a matter of history.

A large military force can be concentrated at Port Arthur on the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the date of which was at first fixed at 1905, although the funds originally estimated for its completion are already exhausted. If, however, she can extract another loan from her ally, the completion may be accelerated.

These deductions were drawn after a study of the situation, as they appeared to an inexperienced looker on who unexpectedly found himself in a vortex of Anglo-phobia; but England, God knows, possesses statesmen able enough to distinguish between honest and dishonest intentions; let them test Russia's good faith in the matter of Persia, and if they are satisfied it is genuine and honest, by all means let there be an Anglo-Russian understanding.

CHAPTER XX

HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT

THE gradual decline of Persia to its present dependence on an aggressive neighbour is not difficult to trace. For sixty years the throne was occupied by an astute and vigilant despot, who, acting up to the tradition of his birth-right, held the lives and property of his subjects in the hollow of his hand. Surrounded by trusty spies, the assets of each and every one was known to a farthing. Foreign loans were at this time unknown ; the blaze of diamonds which appeared in London in 1889 were absolutely unmortgaged, and the boldest traducer would have hesitated to hint that any of the priceless jewels in the palace of the Shah were not what they appeared to be.

During the long period that this monarch occupied the throne England and Russia were played

against each other with a shrewdness that would have done credit to a Tallyrand or a Bismarck. To such an extent was this the keynote of the Shah's policy, that on one occasion when it was suggested that he should turn his attention to the better armament of his army, his reply was: "What does Persia want with rifles? Let England and Russia fight it out."

It would appear incredible to a Western mind that a despot such as he undoubtedly was should have been so beloved during his lifetime, and that his memory to the present day should be as venerated as it most undoubtedly is. The explanation may be found in the fact that he combined a great amount of the "*suaviter in modo*" with the "*fortiter in re*" which specially appeals to the Asiatic mind. The Persian in his heart despises a superior whom he does not fear, and the Shah, with full knowledge of this trait, would ruthlessly despoil a subject of half his patrimony, and then win the hearts of the entire female portion of the family by familiar allusions to themselves and their affairs.

The tactics pursued by the present occupier of the throne are diametrically opposed to all this. With a smattering of French ideas, he holds aloof

from his people, and instead of laying violent hands on what is practically his own, prefers to borrow from designing neighbours, at the same time compromising the interests of his subjects. To such an extent has this impression become universal, that as late as last March the Mullahs forbade His Majesty either to borrow any more money, or to carry out his projected visit to Europe; and it was only after considerable persuasion that they consented to maintain order during his absence, he at the same time guaranteeing that the monies accruing from the new Russian loan should be devoted to the welfare of Persia and the amelioration of the condition of his starving subjects. This, then, is the problem which the unhappy monarch will have to solve on his return to Persia.

Like all Asiatics, the late Shah was always open to making money, and the first speculation that shook Persian credit amongst city capitalists may be traced to this unfortunate predilection. It was in 1889 that the "Persian Investment Corporation, Limited," first burst upon an eager group of city speculators. With a capital of two hundred and seventy thousand pounds in fifty-four thousand shares of five pounds each,

together with five hundred founders' shares of ten pounds each, a glowing prospectus set forth that the ordinary shareholders would be entitled to fifteen per cent. and a moiety of the remaining profits, whilst the balance would be appropriated to founders' shares. The privileged few who were permitted to participate in this golden harvest were required to pay ten shillings on application, thirty shillings on allotment, and the balance a month later, whilst the vendors—with the modesty that usually characterises generous hearts—were willing to accept twenty-five thousand pounds of the purchase money in fully paid-up shares. The directors in many instances were men of unimpeachable character, but who, like many modern guinea-pigs, are prone to accept statements for granted instead of troubling to inquire into the facts. Sandwiched in amongst them were names which, whilst appealing to the credulity of the subscribers, existed in theory rather than in practice ; thus the "Anglo-Asiatic Syndicate" never came into business existence, and the "New Oriental Bank Corporation" turned over its business bodily to the Bank of Persia immediately afterwards.

The original projector of this attractive bubble was said to be General Mikayl Khan, who was

glowingly described as Councillor of the Persian Embassy. (As Persia possesses nothing higher than a Legation, it will be seen that nothing was omitted likely to give *éclat* to the prospectus.) The solicitors were the highest in the land, and the same may be said of the auditors, brokers and bankers, although to the initiated, weak points would have been apparent by the display of names of branch agencies and bankers not of the highest order.

The prospectus set forth that concessions had been acquired for financial exploration, the promotion of commercial and other business, and the exclusive privilege of all Lottery Loans and similar issues, and went on to state that a high and mighty Prince had notified the Company that a High Commissioner would be appointed in Persia charged with the duty of protecting the interests of the subscribers, but not interfering with the internal administration of the Company.

The income, it was estimated, would be from three millions to two millions five hundred and seventy-five thousand per annum, and that although the headquarters of the "System" would be in Persia, their interests would be by no means limited to that country, but would be represented

by agents in the chief cities of Eastern Europe for the purpose of obtaining subscriptions.

The advantages that would accrue to subscribers were elaborately set forth by the information that Lotteries were a favourite form of investment with Persians and Oriental capitalists, and the Government, it was asserted, would raise money by these Lottery Loans, which would be "preferred" by the inhabitants, as affording an attractive outlet for the employment of "Native Capital." The Directors (it continued) were encouraged and confirmed in this opinion by a Banker! and others with considerable experience in Persia.

This precious document concluded with what purported to be a firman, authenticated by the "Minister Plenipotentiary from the Persian Empire to Great Britain," and was duly signed by the Shah, and freely salted with impressive Persian words, such as "Ghora," "Zeghade," "1306, of Hedjira" and signed Naserudin-Shah-Ghaddar. With a hook so temptingly baited it is needless to add that the traffic was temporarily stopped in the vicinity of the building where the shares were issued, by investors fighting to participate in the boom.

The sequel may be summed up in a few words ;

the forty thousand pounds of the capital undoubtedly paid to the Shah, was refunded by His Majesty within six months, but all the available acumen of the Mansion House Police Court was unable to discover into whose hands it eventually fell. An ugly feature of the transaction was that the shareholders received no information of the annulment till a considerable period had elapsed, and twenty thousand pounds it is asserted was actually subscribed after the concession was null and void ; and so the first nail was driven into the Persian financial coffin.

The next incident that created a bad impression with regard to the Persian interpretation of " *Meum and tuum* " was the considerable quantity of unpaid bills that the late Shah left behind him in England. English works on every subject, and that nobody could read, of sufficient quantity to form a public library ; rubbish of every conceivable description — useful and useless — was forced upon him by voracious tradesmen, and although not one farthing was ever paid to them, it is an unquestionable fact that all claims were disbursed by the Shah, but never filtered through the numerous channels that all pecuniary transactions in Persia have to pass.

Apropos of this zeal on the part of tradesmen to foist their wares upon unoffending monarchs, an absurd instance came under my personal observation within the past year. A pushing firm in Teheran received a consignment of some fifty lamps of an elaborate description with which they expected to do great things in Teheran. Submitting one for the Shah's inspection, an order was promptly received for the entire stock to be delivered at the palace ; six months later a modest suggestion having been made as to the payment, the lamps were promptly returned with an intimation that they were not required.

The next event that created ill blood between English and Persian traders was the Tobacco Régi that was granted to a wealthy English Syndicate some ten years ago. The concession was undoubtedly a most valuable one, and from what I gleaned on the spot, its eventual withdrawal may be attributed in a great measure to the overbearing attitude of the various Englishmen who arrived in the country to complete their arrangements and which weaned from them the sympathies of the native population. It is but fair to add, however, that a serious flaw in the contract gave Russia the opportunity of rousing the fanaticism of the

natives. The fatal omission was the one word "Tobacco," the concession reading: "All profits arising out of smoke were assigned to an English Company." Upon this, the Russians enlisted the Mullahs, and telling them that henceforth no Persian could light a fire without paying for the privilege, a Holy War was proclaimed; smoking was declared "unclean," and not a cigarette nor a "Kalian" was smoked for six weeks through the entire length and breadth of Persia.

A Mullah was posted at the entrance of the Bazaar at Meshed with a smoking bush in his hand, and everybody passing was ironically ordered to pay toll; a revolution could be the only outlet for this unrest, and so the Concession was promptly rescinded, and the half million paid to the Shah returned to the Concessionaires. Russia, meanwhile, was on the alert to come to the rescue, but all trouble was averted by the Shah's prompt action in quashing the Concession. Fifty thousand Cossacks were held in readiness at Julfa, whilst telegrams were dispatched every half hour from the Russian Legation in Teheran with instructions that the instant that the flow of telegrams ceased the force was to cross the frontier and advance towards the capital.

Six months ago it was confidently asserted in the Bazaar that a Kurdish rising might be expected within the next few months, and by an extraordinary coincidence news came from St Petersburg a few weeks ago that considerable apprehension existed in regard to this very spot.

These are the usual Russian tactics. First inciting to a disturbance, and then stepping in to quell it. And yet we are seriously assured that England and Russia are quite in accord as to the *status quo*.

The next mistake was the refusal of the English Government to afford facilities for a loan of two and a half millions, which Russia promptly advanced. This may be taken as the key-stone of all Persia's entanglements, and the sequel has yet to follow in the New Russian Loan of £850,000 (now an accomplished fact), and the serious international complications that are sure to follow.

CHAPTER XXI

MESHED AND BUSHIRE

(Turquoise and Pearl)

THE two most valuable sources of revenue in Persia are the turquoise mines at Meshed in the north, and pearl diving in the south.

The turquoise mines are the exclusive property of the Shah, but every person has the privilege of searching for stones on the outskirts of the mines themselves.

The mines known as the "Nishâpûr Turquoise Mines"* are situated in the Bâr-i-Meidan, a district of the Nishâpûr province about 40 miles north-east of Sabzivar, and 32 miles north-west of Nishâpûr. The principal place of the Bâr-i-Meidan district is the village Meidan, which consists of two villages, the Kale-i-bâlâ and the Kale-i-pain, with a population of about 1200 souls.

* I am indebted to General Schindler for the following interesting details.

The Kale-i-bâlâ lies 5100 feet above the level of the sea in latitude $36^{\circ} 28' 11''$ north, and longitude $58^{\circ} 20'$ west of Greenwich. A few smaller villages, there called "kelâtchs," belong to the Meidan village, and contain about 300 inhabitants.

The Meidan village and the territory belonging to it cover about 40 square miles of ground. Most of this is situated in a wide open valley, which, as it has no particular name, we call the Meidan Valley. This valley running in an east-west direction, is bounded on the north by the turquoise mountains, and on the south by the Batau mountains; on the east are some low hills separating it from the Nishâpûr Plain; on the west the ground falls gently towards the Jowein Plain. The thalweg of the Meidan Valley is formed by the Kâl-i-Mansûrah (Kâl means river in Khorassan, or rather a river-bed), which rarely has any water, and flows nearly due west towards the Jowein Plain after receiving several streams from the north, flows through the plain, and then curves southwards, cutting the high road between Shahrud and Meshed a little east of Abbâsâbâd. It is there passed by the Pul-i-Abrisham (Bridge of Silk), famous in former years for the Turkomans, who there, or in its immediate vicinity,

attacked more caravans than anywhere else on the Meshed road.

The mountains of the district consist of nummulitic limestones and sandstones lying on clay slates, and enclosing immense beds of gypsum and rock-salt. The slates rise in the Batau mountains, whose peaks they form to the absolute height of 6400 feet, 1860 feet above the thalweg of the Meidan Valley. The limestones rise in the Si-sar peak, three miles east of the Kale-i-bâlû, to an absolute height of 5900 feet. The stratified rocks are, on the north of the valley, broken through by porphyries and greenstones and in consequence greatly metamorphosed, and the turquoise-bearing ridge consists entirely of porphyries, greenstones and metamorphosed limestones and sandstones. This ridge rises to an absolute height of 6655 feet. The turquoises form veins in the metamorphosed strata, which have partly lost their original stratification, and contain minute pieces of free silica. The general direction of the turquoise veins is N. 70° E. S. 70° W., the same as that of the strike of the stratified rocks. The highest spot at which turquoises have been found lies 5800 feet above the level of the sea, the lowest spot 4800 feet.

The climate is very salubrious. The greatest heat does not exceed 82° to 83° F., the greatest cold is very seldom 4° F. below freezing point. The winter of 1882-83 was exceptionally cold at the mines as it was all over the north of Persia. Wheat and barley and mulberry-trees grow well at an absolute height of 5000 to 5300 feet. Asafoetida and fig-trees, the latter bearing no fruit, grow on the mountain slopes to a height of 6000 feet. The rainfall slightly exceeds that of the greater part of Khorassan. A strong north wind blows almost continually and keeps the air very pure. Some years ago, when most of the villages of the district were ravaged by the plague, and two years ago, when there was an epidemic of diphtheria in the neighbourhood, the Meidan village remained free of sickness.

The inhabitants of the Meidan village are entirely occupied with the obtaining, cutting and selling of turquoises. Agriculture is there very much neglected. Water is not plentiful, but surely enough for the sowing of 100 to 150 kharvars of grain. As it is, only ten to fifteen kharvars are sown, and the harvest hardly ever produces more than 100 kharvars. The villages in the immediate neighbourhood, with the same kind of ground and

soil and almost the same climate, have many "deimî" fields (fields watered by rain only); the Meidan village has none. Some families occupy themselves with the rearing of silkworms, and produce about 120 lbs. of silk per annum. Poppy was sown in a garden in 1881, but was found to contain very little opium; and the people have since then abstained from poppy cultivation. Nearly all the male inhabitants of the Meidan village are inveterate opium smokers, and many women have also acquired that vice. The gain of turquoises has made the people careless of anything else; there are, however, very few of the inhabitants who possess anything worth speaking of. A good turquoise is found, and the money obtained by its sale is spent at once; one can often see at the mines men who yearly pay sixty tomans to the Government, and who gain quite 150 tomans besides, with nothing to eat.

The mines belonging to the Meidan village are:—(1) The turquoise mines; (2) a salt mine; (3) a lead mine; (4) a millstone quarry.

The turquoise mines are of two kinds: (*a*) the mines proper, shafts and galleries in the rocks; and (*b*) the Khaki mines, diggings in the detritus of disintegrated rocks washed down towards the plain.

(a) The mines proper.

The most easterly and according to all accounts the oldest mine is the Abdurrezzâgî, which was formerly called the Abû Ishâgî, and is with that name mentioned in old books. Its mouth is at the absolute height of 5900 feet; it is a very extensive mine and has a depth of about 160 feet vertical from its mouth. For the last few years very few turquoises have been obtained from this mine, but its turquoises are esteemed more than those of other mines. Close to this mine, and in the same valley, are the Surkh, Shâperdâr and Aghâlî mines, which are at present neglected. A little to the west of the Abdurrezzâgî Valley is the "Derreh-i-Safid," the white valley, with the old mines Mâlekî, the upper and lower Zâkî and the Mîrzâ Ahmedi. The former three are immense mines, but almost entirely filled up. In the lower Zâkî, now a vertical shaft of 60 feet in depth, and about 250 feet in circumference, one can plainly see how the mines have got to their present ruined state. It is apparent that the mines were formerly well directed. Vertical shafts were cut into the rock for lighting and ventilating the mine, while the entrance of the mine was by lateral galleries driven in on the slopes of the mountains, and it is

generally believed that the mines were, up to the commencement of the last century, worked by the Government. The mines were then, when the Sefâvîeh dynasty came to an end, neglected and left to the people of the village, or perhaps, as now, farmed to them. The farmers thought only of getting a quick return for their money, and cut away the rock wherever they saw any turquoises, exactly as they do at the present day. The result was that the supporting pillars and the rock between the different shafts were cut away, and that the roof, so to say, of the whole mine fell down, filling it up. The three above-mentioned mines have been filled up like this. One can form an estimate of the original depth of the Zâkî mine from its present depth, which is only to the surface of the former superincumbent roof, and from a shaft or burrow dug into the rubbish of the old mine. This burrow begins where the fallen-down roof begins, at a depth of 60 feet from the mouth of the mine and goes down about another 60 feet vertically. At the end of this burrow, 120 feet below the mouth of the mine, there are still no signs of the original old mine. Several attempts have been made to clear this mine, but no one up to now has had either the will to provide the

necessary funds or the patience to wait for the completion of the work. The turquoises of the "white valley" are also very good, though not so good as those of the Abdurrezzâgî. Many turquoises, generally small, are found in the rubbish of the old mines; they are much prized for their good colour. The mouth of the Mirza Ahmedî mine, which was probably once a part of the Zâkî mines, lies about 80 feet lower than that of the Zâkî mine, and goes down 80 feet vertically. It also has very good turquoises, but working in it is very dangerous on account of the bad state of the galleries and the amount of loose rubbish they contain.

The next valley is the Derreh-i-Dar-i-Kuh. In it are several important mines, the Kerbelâi Kerimi, the Dar-i-Kûh, and others. The Dar-i-Kûh mine is very deep, going down about 150 feet vertically. It is an old and very extensive mine, and some of its galleries continue as far as the Zâkî mine; it is very dangerous on account of the rubbish it contains, which is badly propped up by stones and small sticks, and several labourers have at times been buried in it. One of its galleries called the Dânekî goes for about 100 feet through rubbish; the width of this gallery is 1 to 2 feet,

its height not more, and the descent down it is very unsafe. Only three or four of the miners have the courage to go into this gallery. Some galleries of this mine are completely filled up, and can only be cleared at great expense and with difficulty. Above the mine can be seen many shafts which formerly lighted and ventilated the mine, but are now filled up. All the mines in the Kar-i-Kûh Valley are worked and contain good turquoises.

Further west is the "Derreh-i-Sîyah," the black valley with the old Ali Mirzâi (a contraction of Ali Murtezâ) and the Reîsh mines. The Ali Mirzâi, particularly the lower one of that name, is very dangerous. The rock is very soft and much disintegrated, often falling and filling up the mine. A part of this mine is called the "Bî-râh-rô," the shaft "without a road" to go down into it is very difficult. The turquoises of the Ali Mirzâi are not very good, as their colour soon fades.

On the top of the Reîsh mine, in the same valley, a vein of turquoises was discovered a year or two ago, and a new mine was opened there with the name of "Sar-i-Reîsh" (the head of the Reîsh). In it are found turquoises of fine colour and of great size, but the colour soon fades and the turquoise becomes a dirty green with white and

grey spots. As long as these turquoises are kept damp they preserve their colour; if once they get dry they are worth very little. A turquoise as large as a walnut and of a fine colour was found in this mine last year; it was presented to His Majesty the Shah; after it had been two days with His Majesty it became green and whitish, and was found to be worth nothing.

The next valley called the "Derreh-i-Sabz," the green valley, contains the old Ardelânî and Sabz mines and the new Anjîrî mines. The Ardelânî was once a very great mine; more than twelve old shafts, now all filled up, are still to be seen. Its present entrance is by a large artificial cave with a dome-like roof; it has a vertical depth of 85 feet and is very badly ventilated, having several galleries with foul air. Such galleries are called "chirâgh-kush," *i.e.* lamp extinguishers. The Ardelânî turquoises are not good. A "Jowâher nême" (book on jewels) written during the seventeenth century, mentions that the turquoises of the most inferior quality were obtained from the Ardelânî.

The Sabz mine as its name implies yields green turquoises, and is at present filled up. The Anjîrî mines, which take their name from some fig trees growing in the valley (Anjîr-fig) are new mines.

They have produced during the last few years a very great quantity of turquoises of fine colour which sold well. Their colour, however, soon faded, and their possessors were far from satisfied with their purchases. Unquestionably the great fall in the price of turquoises in Europe is mainly due to the many stones of these, as well as of the Sar-i-Reîsh mines. These stones were sent to Europe and kept moist in earthenware pots till they were sold. Out of the damp they lost colour, and in a year or two they became quite white. European jewellers have at present no confidence in turquoises, and buy only at very low prices.

The next and last, also the most westerly valley, is the one with the Kemerî mine. This mine is full of water at present, and the several attempts made to empty it have failed; it has some thin veins of turquoises, but the stones are of no use for rings, being generally worked into amulets, brooches, seals, etc.

A little to the south of the Ali Mirzâ mine lies the Khurûj mine, very extensive, but partly filled up; it had, some sixty years ago, very good turquoises, and is at present not worked. There are many more mines with names, perhaps a hundred, and more than a hundred nameless ones,

but they are either parts of those I have enumerated, or unimportant. Work in these mines is carried on by means of picks and crowbars, and gunpowder. Blasting with gunpowder has come in vogue only within the last thirty years ; formerly all the work was done by picks, and much better : the picks extracted the turquoises entire ; the gunpowder does more work, but breaks the stones into small pieces.

(*b*) The Khâkî mines are diggings in the detritus and rubbish collected at the foot of the above-mentioned mines and in the alluvial soil, consisting of the detritus of the rocks, and extending from the foot of the mountain a mile or two down to the plain. The finest turquoises are at present found in the Khâkî mines ; in fact, good ring stones are at present obtained only from the Khâkî. Work here is carried on by promiscuous diggings, without any system whatever. The earth is brought to the surface, sifted, and searched for turquoises ; the latter work is generally done by children. The fine turquoise presented by the Kavan-ed-Dowlah to the Shah, valued at two thousand pounds, as well as many other fine ones, was found in the Khâkî.

The salt mine is situated about six miles east

of the Madèn village, near the little hamlet Garaghûchî. The salt consists of an immense bed of rock-salt, inclosed by gypsum and nummulitic limestone. The salt is very white and clear, in many parts quite as transparent as glass, and documents exist relating to this mine dated 1780.

The lead mine lies about six miles south of the Madèn village, in the Batau mountain (which has its name from the village Batau, lying on its southern slopes, in the Tâghûn Kûh district. The lead occurs in irregular veins, striking N. 40° E., S. 40° W., in slates underlying limestones. The mine is not an important one, and has not been worked for many years, in fact not since the accession of the present Shah. As soon as the news of Muhammed Shah's demise reached Khorassan, the Amarlû Kurds revolted, and took possession of the turquoise mines. The inhabitants of the Madèn village fled to the Batau mountain, and worked the lead mine for a few months, till order was restored, and the Kurds left the turquoise mines. The mine has since then been neglected.

The millstone quarry lies about four miles south of the Madèn village, on the northern slope of the Batau mountain. The stones are cut out of a rough

sandstone, or quartzose grit, lying under the sandstone of the nummulitic formation. About twenty or thirty pairs of stones are obtained per annum, and sold at six tomans a pair.

The Persian Government received up to 21st March 1882, on account of these four mines, the sum of 8000 tomans per annum. Either the inhabitants of the Madèn village paid this sum themselves, and worked the mines at their own risk, or some person farmed the mines from the Government for the same sum, retained one or two mines for his exclusive benefit, worked one or two others in partnership with some of the villagers, and sublet the remainder for 5000 or 6000 tomans per annum to the villagers. The villagers generally paid what had been agreed upon in turquoises, and they could sell the turquoises they obtained how and where they liked. The money which they had to pay was divided at the rate of 60 tomans "a head" among the rayots, some rayots, according to their means, number of children, etc., pay a whole head; others seven-eighths, three-fourths, etc., to one-quarter of a head, or 15 tomans a year. The Kedkhodas, of which there were five, paid nothing, and fixed the amount each rayot had to pay. Some Seids

(descendants of Mohammed), two or three Mullahs, the barbers, and some of the relatives or friends of the Kedkhodas were also exempted. The barbers of the district possess firmans from the days of Shah Tânâsp, dated A.H. 1038; of Shah Abbâs, dated 1062; and of Shah Sultan Hussein, dated 1091, exempting them from taxes in perpetuity.

The salt mine was given to the Seids of the village in lieu of 250 tomans pension during Kerîm Khân's reign; the Seids later sold their right to the salt mine for about 2000 tomans to some of the villagers, who since then call the mine their private property. In the Government's accounts, however, the mine still figures as Crown property, at a yearly rent of 250 tomans, and this sum is included in the 8000 tomans which the Government receives from the turquoise mine and its villages. From the 21st March 1882, His Majesty the Shah gave the turquoise mines and the district belonging thereto to the Mukhber-ed-Dowleh, for a period of fifteen years, and the Mukhber-ed-Dowleh agreed to pay 9000 tomans the first year, and 18,000 tomans for the remaining fourteen years.

The turquoises are at the mines first divided

into three classes or kinds: (1) Angushtarî; (2) Bârkhâneh; (3) Arabî.

1. All turquoises of good and "fast" colour and favourable shape are classed with the Angushtarî stones (ring stones), and are sold by the piece. A stone two-thirds of an inch in length, two-fifths of an inch in width, and about half an inch in thickness, cut "peikânî" shape, was valued at Meshed £300, and another of about the same size, shape, and cut, was valued at only £80. Turquoises of the size of a pea are sometimes sold for £8. The colour prized most is the deep blue of the sky. A small speck of a lighter colour, which only connoisseurs can distinguish, or an almost unappreciable tinge of green, decreases the value considerably. Then there is that undefinable property of a good turquoise, the "zât," something like the "water" of a diamond or the lustre of a pearl; a fine-coloured turquoise without the "zât," is not worth much. A deep colour, almost an indigo-like blue, is called "talkh," bitter, and decreases the value of the stone. The best Angushtarî stones are found in the Khâkî diggings, and in the Abdurrezzâgî mine.

2. The bârkhâneh stones are generally divided in four qualities, and are sold by weight. The

first quality costs at the mines 1500 to 1600 tomans per Tabrîz mann, equal to about £90 per lb. The fourth quality is worth 70 to 80 tomans per mann. Only the first, and part of the second quality, are sent to Europe ; the others are sold in the country to Persian jewellers and goldsmiths, particularly at Meshed, and are employed for encrusting Persian articles of jewellery, amulets, dagger and sword hilts and sheaths, horse trappings, pipe heads, etc. One can at Meshed buy small cut turquoises of the third quality at the rate of 2s. to 3s. per 1000. Many of the bârkhâneh turquoises sent to Europe are employed by the European jewellers for rings, but the mere fact of the miners themselves not classing them with the Angushtârî stones, proves that they are not of the first quality.

3. Arâbî turquoises. All stones not belonging to the first two kinds are called Arâbî. Their name is of recent origin, and was first adopted by the 'people at the mines for bad, and in Persia, unsaleable stones. Some of the miners when on a pilgrimage to Mekka, had taken with them a quantity of bad turquoises, and had sold them well to the Arabs. Since then, any pale-coloured or greenish and spotted turquoise, is called Arâbî. The whitish turquoises of this kind are called

shîrbûmî, or shîrfâm, and round pieces with a white crust are called chaghâleh. Many of the so-called Arabî turquoises are, however, bought by Persians, and some also go to Europe. The large flat pieces and slabs used for amulets, brooches, belt buckles, etc., at the mines called tûfâl, are now classed with the Arabî stones, although some of them are very much esteemed; pieces of 2 inches in length, 1 in width, and $\frac{1}{8}$ th in thickness, being sometimes valued at 10 tomans. Stones of a greenish colour, called Gul-i-Kâsnî (chicory), are bought principally by Afghans, and sell on an average at 180 tomans for 12 lbs. in weight of pale-coloured, uncut, tûfâl stones.

About 200 men of the village work in the mines and in the Khâkî diggings, and twenty-five or thirty, the Rîsh-i-Safîds, Elders of the village, buy the turquoises and sell them to merchants and jewellers, either at Meshed or at the mines. The original finders of the turquoises do not gain much; a man who works in the mines gains on an average 5 krans per diem in turquoises. Work in the mines is difficult, but sure; a miner never returns empty-handed. In the diggings the work is comparatively easy, but the finding of a turquoise is a matter of chance.

It often happens that a miner, after working hard for a few months in the mines, and having saved a few tomans, tries his chance at the diggings, works there, finding nothing till his money is finished, sells and pawns his goods and chattels, still finds nothing, and finally, to keep starvation from the doors, has to return to the mines. Good workmen never go to the Khâkî diggings, but send their children there. Of the 200 miners at the village quite 130 work in the mines; the old and the weak, the lazy, or those who possess a little property and are in no want of a certain daily gain, work in the Khâkî. During the summer months many strangers come to the mines and try their chance at the diggings. The Rîsh-i-Safîds (the white beards) generally buy the turquoises direct from the workmen, and sell them to the merchants at Meshed, or to "dellâls" (commission agents) who visit the mines. The first profit on all turquoises is never less than 10 per cent., generally amounts to 20 per cent. That is, one of the Rîsh-i-Safîds buys turquoises for 10 tomans from a miner, or from different miners, and sells them to a "dellâl" for 12 tomans. The "dellâl" goes to Meshed and sells them to the dealers for 14 or 15 tomans. The dealer sorts

them, sells some of them in the country, and sends the remainder to Europe, generally to Moscow, where they are sold by special "dellâls" to the European dealers. It may be calculated that turquoises bought for 10 tomans at the mines are sold for 25 tomans in Europe. It is strange that European dealers have up to now not thought it worth their while to send their own agents to the mines.

The miners themselves rarely cut their turquoises, and they therefore seldom know if they have found any good stones or not. The Rîsh-i-Safîd, who is the first buyer, however, often half cuts the turquoises, and is then enabled to sort them. The Angushtari turquoises are then put aside and sold singly, and enormous profits are often made.

The above mentioned £300 Meshed turquoise was bought from the finder by one of the Rîsh-i-Safîds for £3; the latter sold it still uncut at Meshed for £38. As soon as it was cut, its true value became apparent, and it was sent to Paris, where it was valued at £600. The second purchaser, however, received only £340 for it, the difference being gained by the agents.

The annual output of the mines, mountains, and diggings averaged for the last few years 25,000

tomans' worth of turquoises, valued at the mines. The final purchasers probably pay three times this amount.

The turquoises are now generally cut by wheels made of a composition of emery and gum. The emery is brought from Badakshân, the gum from India. The cutter drives the wheel with his right hand by means of a stick and a piece of string, which latter is twisted round the axle of the wheel; he holds the stone with his left hand against the wheel, the thumb and one finger holding the stone being protected by rags, leather, or flat pieces of wood. Wheels have not been in use long, perhaps only thirty years. Formerly all turquoises were cut on slabs of sandstone. The turquoise was held by a slit in a piece of wood, and was rapidly rubbed up and down the stone. Even now many stones are cut in this manner. Very small stones are never cut on the wheel, but always on the sandstone. After the turquoises have been cut, they are polished by being rubbed, first on a slab of very fine grained sandstone ("masgal"), and then on a piece of soft leather with turquoise dust which has been collected from the wheels. This polishing process is called "jelâ dâdam."

The pay of a turquoise cutter at the mines or at

Meshed is 1 to 2 krans per diem, the cutter providing wheel and other necessities. A cutter on stone never receives more than 1 kran per diem. The final polishing is generally done by children, who receive one-third to one-half kran per diem. One man can cut a handful of turquoises a day; one polisher suffices for three cutters. Turquoises are cut in various shapes. The shape depends on the size and original shape of the stone as well as on its quality. The two principal shapes are the "peikânî" and the "mussatah," that is, the conical and the flat. The less the cone is truncated the more the turquoise is prized, and, again, a conical turquoise with an elliptical base is worth more than one with a circular base. Turquoises not possessing sufficient thickness for the "peikânî" cut, and being thicker than necessary for the flat cut, are cut *en cabochon*, and the higher the convex surface the greater the value of the turquoise. Only very fine and deep-coloured turquoises are cut in the "peikânî" shape; the apex of a bad and pale-coloured turquoise would, if cut "peikânî" shape, appear almost white. The slabs of the Arabî quality are generally cut plain, seldom with a convex surface. Smaller stones are employed for seals, larger stones for

amulets, etc. The larger stones are never free of flaws, and seldom have a good colour, but the jewellers very cleverly hide the flaws with a scroll-work of gold, or, if there be any characters engraved on the stone, they manage to place the letters, and particularly the diacritical points, just over the flaws.

Some of the inhabitants of the Madèn village say that their ancestors were Jews, others say that their ancestors came originally from Badakhshân, where they were ruby cutters. Many of the inhabitants are Seids of the family of the fifth Imâm, and one of the sons of that Imâm lies buried at the village Germâb, a few miles north-west of the mines. I saw a genealogical tree of one of these Seids, written in the fourteenth century. The name of the Madèn village was formerly Pâshân, changed later on into Fishân. The turquoise mines are rarely mentioned in Persian histories.

The north-eastern part of Khorassan has three important salt mines: the mine near Sharîfâbâd, 24 miles south of Meshed; that of Abjû, 15 miles from Nishâpûr; and that of the turquoise mines. Meshed and its environs, and the village as far as Gadamgâh, about 16 miles to the south-

east of Nishâpûr, take their salt from the first mine. Nishâpûr and its villages are provided from the second, and all the country to the north as far as Kuchan, and even Askabad, take their salt from the last mine—the one belonging to the turquoise mine village. This last mine has thus the greatest sale. It sells, at a low estimate, 15,000 loads at £150 to £180 each per annum, or a total quantity of about 1100 tons. The salt is sold at the mine at the rate of 1 kran per donkey load, which is equal to about 13 krans, say about 9s. per ton.

The pearl fisheries in the south are very jealously guarded, and being situated both in Persian and Arabian waters their integrity is a matter of solicitude even to our own Government. No kind of dredging is permitted, and the search is confined to the old-fashioned system of diving. Some years ago an enterprising English firm was permitted to make an inspection of the banks, and it was found by experienced divers, who walked for miles under water, that the banks were so steep, that many of the oysters had presumably slipped into deep water, but all applications for anything beyond the primitive procedure were vigorously opposed for fear of interfering with the vested rights of the local Arabs.

Bushire is an open roadstead, and all ships discharging cargo have to lay off at a considerable distance, from the fact that there is no pier whatever. Our own Government, indeed, vetoed the erection of a pier some years ago on the plea that the accumulation of shifting sand would necessitate dredging in order to keep the waterway clear, and it was feared that when the dredge was not required for this particular object it might occasionally turn its attention to the search for pearls. The revenue from this industry is estimated at about three million rupees per annum, and the pearls here found are admittedly the purest in the world.

The distance from Teheran to Bushire is 700 miles, and, with the exception of a short portion to Kum, is about as impossible a journey as can be well conceived. It is to be hoped, however, that a concession lately granted to the Bank of Persia will result in a military road under British auspices being extended from Kum to Bushire. The ordinary journey for caravans occupies seventy days, and the post, travelling day and night, takes a fortnight.

Isfahan, which is one of the principal half-way houses, is celebrated as containing the great

Mosque, and the Governor of the district, which extends to Shiraz, is Zil-i-Sultan, a brother of the Shah's, who was appointed to this distant command on account of his well-known British proclivities.

It is stated that three years ago during the bread riots he stopped the spread of the insurrection by very summary measures. Three bakers, who had bought up all the flour, were publicly baked in their own ovens—after which, it may be assumed Isfahan resumed the even tenor of its way.

Russian influence in this district is at a discount, although the Russian Consul-General, Prince Dabeji (an Armenian) loses no opportunity of furthering his country's cause by encouraging the natives to refer their grievances and claims to him. But England also has a Consul-General in Isfahan, and, thanks to the representations of the British Minister in Teheran, a Sikh guard now stands guard over the old flag, as it ought to do in every city in Persia.

In the Persian Gulf two obsolete gunboats represent the naval supremacy of England, and some evil-disposed persons might discover in this short-sighted arrangement the same disregard for display which pervades our entire policy in regard

to Persia. Russia, however, ever watchful, occasionally sends one of her largest cruisers to disport itself in these waters, and last summer the *Variag* gave nightly displays of electric searchlights that would have done credit to a Brock's benefit at the Crystal Palace. The effect was not lost upon the Persian mind, and comparisons between the two Powers were freely made in every bazaar in the kingdom.

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING FORTH

TRAVELLING over the ordinary road from Teheran to the Caspian is a very different experience from the journeys either from Tabriz in the north or Bushire in the south. Extending for ninety miles, one traverses for sixteen hours a magnificent military causeway which brings one to Kasvin ; from this point passing through Aghababa, Yusbatchi, Latchenar, Menjil and Kuhdum, one arrives at Resht, an important mercantile town on the shores of the Caspian, some two hundred and fifty miles from Teheran. This route is the ordinary one between Persia and Europe, and is capable of being undertaken by carriage or cart ; built with Russian money, the carrying of the mails, the caravansaras, the numerous toll gates, and the hire of horse and carriages are strict Russian Government monopolies ; no

wayfarer can obtain board or lodging unless travelling by the company's horses or carts; tollhouses with Russian inscriptions confront one every few hours; the accommodation is of the worst and the most expensive, and this comparatively short journey costs as much as traversing the entire extent of Russia first class between Baku and Berlin. A rickety carriage, for example, costs twelve pounds, to which may be added bachsheesh at every change of horses; exorbitant charges for excess of luggage over sixty-five pounds at the rate of two shillings per stone; tolls which amount to twenty-eight shillings, and the worst of food at the highest prices,—making a grand total of eighteen pounds. That this is no exaggeration may be inferred from the fact that when I arrived at Kasvin every wheel had to be taken off and replaced, and the only prospect of arriving at the end of our journey in safety was by the purchase of a considerable number of yards of rope; and so, bandaged, trussed and knotted, we continued our jolt of seventy hours.

Yusbatchi is the commencement of the mountain road which traverses the entire distance till within a few miles of the coast, and although every yard displays unquestionable engineering excellence,

there are zigzags, steep inclines, narrow defiles and overhanging precipices quite appalling to a traveller on his first arrival from Europe.

Menjil is notorious for a wind which, rising about 10 A.M. every morning, keeps up a shrill howl all night with the velocity of a hurricane until it gradually drops for a few hours at early morning, 'The road at this point extends along the ridge of a range of mountains at a high altitude, where snow and hail are usually encountered; such hail I have never before experienced and utterly unprotected as we were, the sensation was that of being bombarded with red-hot tacks. Descending by a circuitous road, one crosses the Sefid-Rud River by a magnificent bridge, after which one enters upon a fine open country with vegetation which subsequently blends into forest land. Traversing a fine forest through the entire day, one reaches Kuhdum, when farewell is said to the mountains, and one reaches the coast by an easy road.

Arriving at this inhospitable caravansara we decided to postpone the continuance of our journey till the morning, rather than persist in facing the snowstorm through which we had travelled for forty-eight hours. Arriving half-frozen at our

wretched destination, where hot water for the inevitable "chi" was the only refreshment procurable, we found ourselves in a dreary room with windows that would not close, and a rickety verandah projecting therefrom. Without, the snow was falling heavily and a moon which under happier circumstances would have shone brightly, was struggling to cheer the solitude with her gentle rays; the dismal howl of the jackal was heard on every side, whilst here and there a stray wolf emboldened by hunger was cautiously prowling within a few yards of the caravansara. Anxiously awaiting his nearer approach I fired three revolver shots into him when he was but a few yards below me, and had the gratification of seeing him roll over. Next morning was devoted to skinning his carcase, but a few portions of flesh that had apparently been left in his feet caused the hair to fall out, and on my arrival in England I had the mortification of being informed that it would not bear stuffing. His head however occupies a prominent position on my walls, as an exciting memory of the first, and certainly the last wolf I shall ever have the privilege of laying low.

During the entire journey one passes caravans

of every description, loaded with every conceivable kind of wares ; bar silver for the bank, absolutely unguarded, bales of merchandise with Manchester marks upon them, strings of donkeys with loads they can barely stagger under, and then a caravan of camels, with here and there a venerable patriarch carrying a grand piano as complacently as if it were an everyday occurrence, all tending towards Teheran to assist in the gaieties of that delightful town. Leaving Kasvin, we met Sefid-Dowleh, the governor of the province, who with his retinue was happily changing horses at Aghababa at the time we arrived there. Received with the courtesy that characterises the bearing of the higher Persians, His Excellency directed that we should be forthwith provided with fresh horses, a commodity the lying caravansara keeper had just informed us he did not possess in his stables. This is a very common trick, and saves them considerable trouble and expense, if they can impose upon the unwary to continue to the next stage with jaded horses. If two conveyances meet on the road it is an invariable habit of the rascally drivers to proceed to change horses and return to their respective destinations, and if after starting with fresh horses one happens to meet a cart that

has travelled twenty miles the disadvantage of changing fresh for jaded horses is apparent.

It was between one of these stages that the ruse was attempted between us and a cartload of Russians ; personally the exchange was to our advantage, so we said nothing, and complacently sat and smoked while the horses were being unyoked ; but our drivers were evidently unaware of the difference between the two nationalities, and almost before a buckle was unfastened four infuriated Muscovites descended from their vehicle and belaboured the driver within an inch of his life ; he was kicked with heavy boots, smashed over the face with heavy whips, and with his hat on the ground and his clothes half torn off his back, he was thrown back on to his perch more dead than alive, and eventually they proceeded on their way rejoicing. It is admittedly the only way to keep the lower Persians in order, but it is a lesson they have yet to learn, and when Teheran is a little more Russianised than it is at present, considerable improvement may be expected amid the trifles that constitute the sum-total of existence. Many absurd incidents occurred to divert the monotony of this five days' journey ; passing along a dreary stretch of road

a couple of fowls that had wandered beyond the immediate vicinity of their homestead excited the cupidity of our lynx-eyed driver, who, jumping off his seat, whip in hand, gave chase to the unhappy roosters; infected by the enthusiasm of the hunt, my companion was soon in full cry, and as it was bitterly cold I added my quota to the sport, and at the next post-house we were rewarded by the luxury of sitting down to an excellent dish of chicken pillau.

A little further on we met a large caravan of donkeys in a narrow pass, and as these stupid animals never get out of people's way, we had to decide between the edge of a precipice and driving through them; our jehu evidently preferred the latter, and for five minutes we literally bumped over a steeplechase course of donkeys and their bales. Anon, we would pass a caravan of camels, whose drivers had evidently arranged to annex our luggage; waiting till the exact moment when one of these kleptomaniacs was in the act of putting a knife through the rope, my companion jumped out and imparted a wholesome lesson that would have done credit to a Muscovite instructor.

On another occasion my companion, who was

unacquainted with the Russian language, asked the Muscovite toll-house keeper if he spoke French; but the accent was such a diabolically Scottish brogue that his friend failed to recognise the language of his country's ally.

One could not but admire the magnificent engineering that characterised the road in many parts; blasted through solid granite, with terrible inclines here, and zigzag approaches there, it was evident that a battery of artillery posted at an elevation in the vicinity of Yusbatchi could have checked the advance of an overwhelming enemy. All this, be it remembered, is a military road constructed by Russia, not only with an eye to its commercial, but also to its strategical advantages. Resht and Enzeli are within twenty-four hours of Baku, whence 50,000 Cossacks by skirting the Caspian could reach Teheran within sixty hours. The new military road about to be constructed by Russia from Tabriz to Teheran will also afford similar facilities from the direction of Julfa, all which may be assumed to be the *status quo* on which our complacent rulers so pride themselves.

Passing through the defiles, copper confronted one on every side. The hillsides blazed with the

greenish tints that denoted the presence of native copper, ruby copper and oxide of copper, and every stone one picked up gave undoubted presence of the mineral. A seam of galena a foot thick extended for two miles along the roadside, and an assay I have since had made by a distinguished expert, shows this ore to carry some sixty per cent. of lead, and some seven ounces of silver per ton.

Arriving at Resht we found it was impossible to proceed further. A blinding snowstorm that had lasted for days had made the roads to Pirbazar very heavy; the sea we were informed was running high, and the surf through which we should have to pass to reach the steamer had made the bar impassable, so we decided to make a night at the hotel, and proceed at daylight to the coast. Travellers compelled by circumstances to make a night at Resht would do well to try a new hotel, "Les Etrangers," where the accommodation and the cuisine are infinitely superior to and half the price of that of the old-established place, "The Albert."

Resht is practically a Russian town. All the industries are in the hands of Russians; the Russian flag flies over most of the large com-

mercial houses, and the Consulate makes a grand display in the centre of the town. The journey from Pirbazar can only be described as delightful. Proceeding along a narrow river in an open boat propelled by eight oars, one passed between banks that literally teemed with every species of wild fowl ; wild geese rose leisurely as we passed, only to settle again within a few yards ; the huge brown duck, I had formerly met with near Tabriz, plover of every description and flamingoes in all their glory were here to be met with in countless numbers. Gradually the river widens, till one enters a lagoon, where a small steam launch awaits intending passengers by the steamer. Getting out of an open boat and scrambling over a rail are not the easiest of tasks on the smoothest water, but with an agreeable "lop" after a two days' storm, getting myself and my luggage safely on board was an acrobatic feat I was a little proud of. Steaming for an hour, we eventually reached the final Custom House of Persia, where under ordinary circumstances one would have been required to go on shore and submit to a rummage, for Persia under Russian tuition has developed amazingly in the art of levying toll, and everybody now has to pay not only upon entering but upon leaving the

country ; it was, however, snowing so heavily that I beckoned a high official to come alongside, and having presented him with a toman (3s. 9d.) he considerably waived his prerogative.

Five hundred yards out at sea a dangerous surf has to be passed, and although not as bad as that at Madras or East London, is by no means free of risk from the persistent manner in which the helmsman invariably steers broadside on to the waves.

A mile further out the Russian weekly steamer awaited us, and at 8 P.M. Sunday, February the 23rd, I waved my "Khuda-hafeez" (God be with you) to Persia. One finds great difficulty in making oneself understood by the Russian officials, and the course I was compelled to adopt, however otherwise satisfactory, was somewhat circuitous. Amongst the officers of the ship happened to be a Turk, and a passenger with whom I had struck up an acquaintance was an Armenian who had a smattering of French ; so every time I desired to address the captain, I conveyed it to the Armenian in French, who in his turn passed it on to the Turk who repeated it to the Russian skipper ; thus my morning salutation at breakfast by this brilliant process, never exceeded five minutes in transit.

Thirty-six hours later we reached Baku, and again had to run the irritating gauntlet at the hands of the Russian Custom House. Ruminating during one's short trip across the Caspian, one could not but realise in what a deadly grip the Russian Octopus held Persia; every artery that led to her heart was practically in their hands; Persia was Russian in everything but name, and one was fain to ask: "Is this unsatisfactory situation to be maintained, or is England prepared to press the Teheran Government to remove the embargoes now stifling British trade, or will we sacrifice prestige and every other interest on the grounds of political expediency?"

England *must* have a definite policy, and decide what is indispensable and what is not, and how far she is prepared to go in the assertion of her position; whether Persia should not be compelled to define clearly her relations towards England and Russia respectively is a simpler matter, and if emphasized in unmistakable terms, the result may indirectly be the same.

CHAPTER XXIII

THROUGH HOLY RUSSIA

ALTHOUGH alongside at six A.M., it was close upon nine before a passenger was permitted to leave the ship. First, one's passports were collected, and shortly afterwards a health officer came on board ; half-an-hour later a battalion of Custom House officials and policemen and Cossacks lined the quay, and when every precaution had been taken, passengers were permitted to disembark by sections. Every box and every parcel had to be shaken out, and when the uncouth officials were satisfied there was nothing contraband, one was graciously permitted to replace one's belongings. The next important duty was to recover one's passport, and after being directed from pillar to post for half-an-hour, I had the gratification of running it to earth at a police bureau half a mile from the ship.

Arriving at the principal hotel, I received the agreeable information that there was not a bath to be procured in Baku; the squirt that I had become familiar with six months previously was staring me in the face over an adjacent basin, so after a week's delightful anticipation of a revelry amidst boiling water and carbolic soap, I had to put up with a vessel of the dimensions of a saucepan.

Baku's chief interest lies in the petroleum springs, and as my train did not leave till 3.30, I drove beyond the town to inspect these interesting freaks of nature. Future travellers must avoid the error that I fell into of poring over a map and then selecting the straightest route between Baku and Alexandrovo. Pursuing this erroneous idea, I took my ticket *via* Rostof, Karkorf, Kief, and Warsaw; whereas had I stuck to the main line, as did a wiser fellow-passenger who accompanied me as far as Rostof, I should have travelled without changing carriages until the Austrian frontier was reached. Once off the main line a foreigner's troubles are literally endless. Forty-eight hours after leaving Baku I had to change at Rostof, and every subsequent twelve hours afterwards at Karkorf, Kief and Warsaw respectively, whereas had I booked as my acquaint-

ance advised me, I should not have changed my coupé till I reached the Austrian frontier, on the following Saturday. Travellers to or from Persia must distinctly understand that they should book from Baku to Volotchisk *via* Vienna, when the entire journey is smooth sailing.

Happily there are no restrictions on the Russian railways as to luggage, and my entire belongings were constantly under my own eye ; losing luggage in Russia involves considerable delay, and a man assured me that he once lost a portmanteau which he only recovered eighteen days afterwards in Moscow.

Happily the Czar was not taking a journey in my neighbourhood, for, as I was informed, three days before so important an event, the entire railway system is practically suspended ; ordinary trains are shunted into sidings or sheds, whilst trucks loaded with hay and straw are drawn up at the various stations to prevent the possibility of a pot shot at the Imperial train. Twenty thousand troops are usually required to guard the line, and with loaded rifles facing outwards make short work of anything or anybody within range. Finding myself suddenly in such a vortex of suspicion, precaution and passports, I was

almost inclined to yearn for the barbaric security associated with travelling in Persia, where oil dips were the staple illuminations, vermin the usual companions, and typhoid confronted one at every corner.

Between Rostof and "Mineral Waters" which skirt a dangerous district, the journey is by no means devoid of danger. A very few years ago a train was held up, the engine driver killed, and the passengers relieved of all their valuables by a band of brigands. A fellow-passenger congratulated himself as we steamed slowly into Rostof early in the morning, that we had passed with safety through this dangerous district, and I then remembered that the door of my coupé, which was fortunately secured inside, had been twice tried during the night, and I make no doubt that robbery was intended, if nothing worse. A demented old lady who wandered along the corridors apparently day and night, and whose nephew was killed in her presence on the occasion above referred to, was pointed out to me as a constant traveller on this line.

Rostof is the reputed centre of Nihilism, and the station literally swarms with Cossacks and secret police, but the terrors of the past night were

speedily forgotten as we sat down to an excellent breakfast of sucking pig, for which the town is celebrated. Nowhere are such meals found—smoking hot and at reasonable prices—as at a Russian railway station; and I venture to submit that a slice of excellent salmon with tartar sauce, followed by a partridge, and accompanied by a bottle of wine, coffee and Cognac, such as I enjoyed in the evening at the Karkorf Buffet for less than three shillings and sixpence, is infinitely preferable to the cold sausage and tallow sandwich dietary so dear to the British traveller.

It was a novel experience to see large rivers like the Dnieper and the Don used for short cuts by waggons and pedestrians. For four days and nights one travelled through a continuous stretch of ice, snow and frost; but the luxurious coupés—overheated indeed—with one's belongings around one, made the contemplation delightful, and places Russia very near the pinnacle of adepts in the art of travelling.

A particular nuisance is the *Place - Carte* system, a species of toll varying from two to ten roubles, according to the length of the journey, which every traveller is bound to pay in addition to the ordinary fare.

During the journey towards Kief I met an agreeable fellow-traveller, who spoke English fluently, and who permitted me to inspect his passport such as every Russian subject is bound to carry, and which consists of eighteen pages of information on every conceivable point, from his own personal description to that of his wife, sisters, cousins, aunts, children, parents, and place of residence.

Kief is a delightful town, and after the luxury of a Turkish bath I listened to the strains of a Roumanian band consisting of ten instrumentalists in their picturesque national dress which played during the afternoon in the restaurant of the Grand Hotel. At the next table there sat a Russian general in full uniform armed to the teeth, who was plying his knife and fork—especially his knife—with considerable gusto, and the dexterity with which it disappeared down his throat with the rapidity of a steam piston, set me longing to ask him whether he was open to an engagement at a London music hall during the Coronation festivities. But whilst I was watching him somebody apparently had been watching me, and shortly afterwards a courteous individual approached my table and requested me to show

my passport. Having satisfied himself that I was not a Nihilist, we became the best of friends and drank considerably more "Vodka" than the circumstances demanded. Vodka is the glycerine and tannin concoction I have before described.

The droskies here are the most diminutive I have ever seen, and the seats possess the peculiarity of having no backs, so that it was with considerable trepidation that I found myself bumping over the ill-paved streets. It had been raining, moreover, and a somersault backwards meant an immersion in a mud bath.

The names over the shops, from their novelty and curious lettering, cannot fail to interest a stranger; and when I saw "Solomon Cohen" in huge Russian hieroglyphics, the name appeared familiar to me, and I felt I was nearing England. Jews in Russia are not *personæ gratæ*.

It was with considerable relief, after some thirty hours more train, that I again crossed the frontier of Holy Russia; and it was refreshing even to be awakened out of a profound sleep and invited, in a strong "sauerkraut" accent, to show my ticket. Henceforth the journey was of the commonplace order, so resisting the temptation of describing a channel fog or the purchase of a halfpenny news-

paper at New Cross, I will conclude my experiences by stating that I eventually found myself on the identical spot at Victoria that I had left eight months previously.

During that period I had covered upwards of ten thousand miles, seven hundred of which were roadless, and had passed over hedges and ditches and four-foot walls, at one time through swollen rivers, at another along hanging precipices, much of which, it is no exaggeration to assert, not twenty Europeans have ever traversed.

CHAPTER XXIV

ENGLAND TO THE RESCUE

BEFORE bidding adieu to the fascinating subject of Persia, I feel it is due the reader to offer some apology for occasionally trespassing upon the dangerous domain of politics instead of confining myself religiously to the track of the stereotyped traveller.

I passed through Russia with no pre-conceived ideas or prejudices against it as a nation, but everywhere found myself confronted by a deep-rooted hatred towards England and Englishmen which little pains was taken to conceal. Later, on reaching Persia, I found British prestige at the lowest ebb, brought about apparently by Muscovite gold and Muscovite intrigue; anon I read in such papers as the *Times*, of January 23rd, that: "We have exchanged assurances with Russia

affirming that it is the policy of the two States to maintain the integrity of Persia." I discovered as I went deeper into the question that all these "exchanged assurances" were mere blinds; that Russia lost no opportunity of strengthening her grip upon Persia, and that our politicians, our press, and our country generally had no idea of the true position of affairs.

If the integrity of Persia is of no serious moment to England, no more need be said on the subject; but if the safety of India depends upon Russia obtaining no foothold on the Persian Gulf, how, one would ask, is it to be secured, when every day they are encroaching nearer and nearer, and no steps whatever are taken to check the aggression? Russia, with two military roads under her control leading direct to Teheran; Russia with her Minister and her Resident Cossack General practically dictating at Teheran; Russia with her prohibitions with regard to railways, loans, armaments—this surely means something, and can hardly be interpreted as the maintenance of the *status quo*!

Events in Persia progress at such lightning speed that the latter pages of a work may easily appear to contradict what is stated at its commencement; but these in their turn must before

long give place to a state of affairs so grave that the names of Persia and Russia will ring in every Englishman's ears, and the lethargy that has characterised our national policy will have to be cast aside, to be supplanted by unmistakable language, backed up by irresistible force.

Ringling in my ears are the words written to me from Teheran six months ago : " We are, I fear, going to have trouble here," and already are heard of wars and rumours of wars, distress of nations and perplexity ; but the end is—not yet.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
ANNOUNCEMENTS,	2	LEADERS OF RELIGION, . . .	30
GENERAL LITERATURE, . . .	8-27	SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY, .	30
METHUEN'S STANDARD LIBRARY,	27	UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES, .	31
BYZANTINE TEXTS,	27	COMMERCIAL SERIES,	31
LITTLE LIBRARY,	28	CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS, . . .	31
LITTLE GUIDES,	28	SCHOOL EXAMINATION SERIES, .	32
LITTLE BIOGRAPHIES, . . .	28	METHUEN'S JUNIOR SCHOOL-BOOKS,	32
LITTLE BLUE BOOKS	29	TEXTBOOKS OF TECHNOLOGY, .	32
LIBRARY OF DEVOTION, . . .	29	FICTION,	32-33
OXFORD COMMENTARIES, . . .	29	THE FLEUR DE LIS NOVELS, . .	39
HANDBOOKS OF THEOLOGY, . .	29	BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS, .	40
CHURCHMAN'S LIBRARY, . . .	29	THE NOVELIST,	40
CHURCHMAN'S BIBLE,	30	METHUEN'S SIXPENNY LIBRARY, .	40

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